

NEXT STAGE

THE SOCIAL GOOD REPORT: PROFIT & PURPOSE



2021

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About This Report

The Social Good Report: Profit & Purpose is an in-depth examination of how social good gets done in the Queen City. This study examines the way businesses and nonprofits are constructing innovative partnerships aimed at community impact.

It is also an exploration of how 'doing good' drives the bottom line of the private sector. While this may seem a provocative concept, Next Stage sourced courageous business leaders willing to go on record with examples of how engaging with nonprofits and aligning with positive community impact drives profitability by increasing revenue and decreasing expenses.

Research was conducted between August 2020 and March 2021 by Next Stage, a Charlotte-based consulting company that partners with private sector change-makers and nonprofit organizations to design and implement strategies that build strong organizations and fuel community change. Primary research sources included:

- ◆ 50+ interviews with business leaders across a range of expertise, including leadership, brand development, corporate social responsibility, talent development and more.
- ◆ 30+ interviews with community and nonprofit leaders, including a range of organization sizes, expertise and focus areas.
- ◆ An online survey of more than 350 Millennials and Gen Z in Mecklenburg County, designed to shed light on changing expectations around social good and company engagement.

Learn more about Next Stage by visiting our website at www.nextstage-consulting.com or by following What's Next?, our twice-monthly webcast where we convene businesses and nonprofits partnering together to build real community change.

About the Co-Authors

Josh Jacobson is the Founder and CEO of Next Stage where he specializes in strategic positioning and tactical implementation, helping companies and nonprofits develop the plans and platforms to advance their goals. Over the last 15 years, Josh has directly managed engagement with more than 250 institutions and is known for bringing expansive thinking and practical implementation to the work of Next Stage.

Janet Ervin is Chief Marketing Officer at Next Stage, bringing a depth of experience in strategic positioning, brand development and communications. With significant experience as a practitioner in the nonprofit sector, Janet has also worked in the corporate sector where she built social impact programs driving workforce development goals.

Definition: Social Good

Activities aimed at helping the greatest number of people in the greatest possible way; a positive societal impact.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Your business has already changed - you just don't know it yet.

As pandemic conditions continue to improve, employees and business leaders will begin to venture back into offices. Our community is returning to a work world that will never be the same - but the pandemic didn't cause it. Charlotte is living at the intersection of significant cultural, political and generational change and the stakes are high for companies and the community alike.

The reentry into daily life will likely reveal that our systems, businesses, institutions and faith communities are permanently disrupted - and sometimes broken - in ways that we didn't expect. But these disruptions aren't new.

The publication of the Chetty Study in 2014 gave Charlotte yet another wake-up call. Despite best efforts from many organizations and institutions over a long period of time, our community ranked dead last among 50 cities for economic mobility. Children who are born into poverty in Mecklenburg County will most often die in poverty, just miles from where they were born. The study only provided metrics for something that was already deeply felt. Protests after the Keith Lamont Scott shooting in 2016 forced many individuals to contend with the long-ranging impacts of racial segregation and inequality.

Our institutions have had good intentions to study what is happening and deploy resources that will enable change. Charlotte is defined by a generous spirit, southern hospitality and a 'can-do attitude' when it comes to commitment to community. Leaders in a diverse range of neighborhoods, businesses and nonprofits have long worked toward what is best for the community.

So why do so many people in Mecklenburg County continue to lag behind?

It's time to throw out the corporate social responsibility rulebook and invest in a new paradigm. Approaches to societal change are evolving across the country. Google 'social good' and you'll find articles about social entrepreneurship and 'third way' businesses. There exists a growing collective understanding that our systems need to change and that we all need to play a role, driven by several factors that are rapidly influencing how we tackle our biggest challenges.

1. Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic didn't cause the disruption to nonprofit and corporate business models - these changes have been coming for a long time. Instead, it revealed the weaknesses in the systemic approaches our institutions have deployed and forced us to confront realities that we've been applying band-aids to for far too long. Existing gaps and cracks in the deployment model that had long been at a low boil became overnight emergencies. A tent city appeared on the side of I-277. Food pantries couldn't keep their shelves stocked because of demand. When schools closed, nonprofits were forced to set up outdoor tents next to school buildings so children could access wi-fi - because one in five homes in Mecklenburg County lack access to the Internet.



It's time to throw out the corporate social responsibility rulebook and invest in a new paradigm.

2. Social Change

Employers were forced to consider work-life balance and mental health in new ways. Workers who were already juggling a lot were suddenly drowning under the increased demand of their jobs, families and virtual education for their children. A mental health crisis appeared alongside the 'main' pandemic, and businesses suddenly needed to consider how to best support and engage their workers as everyone struggled to adapt to the realities of a virtual environment.

Talk about a challenge for companies. For a long time, 'taking care of community' was relegated to community engagement, marketing or corporate social responsibility (CSR) departments. And while those efforts did a lot of good, the challenges of the past year demand new approaches. The tides are changing and we can no longer ignore what's at stake - most importantly the health and success of every Mecklenburg County resident.

Beyond philanthropic efforts, these shifts mean that business profitability itself is at stake. If we continue to apply temporary solutions to these challenges, organizations will struggle even more with issues of recruitment, culture, marketing, sales and sustainability. Alternatively, if companies embrace these changes, we can create a stable economy where everyone thrives and has access to opportunity.

Set against the backdrop of a global pandemic, the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd ignited a long smoldering cry for racial justice and social change. Like the pandemic, the protests that took place throughout the summer of 2020 did not start a movement for racial justice, but forced it into the spotlight in ways that could no longer be ignored by mainstream culture.

On another front, increasing concern about climate change and sustainability focused greater attention on brand practices and the way company policies are impacting the world. As people feel the real-world impacts of climate change, consumers expect the businesses they frequent to acknowledge and address the problem. Nearly 60% of US consumers want the companies they engage to take a stand on issues of racial justice, climate change and more.

In the past, companies could keep their heads down and 'refuse to play politics.' Social issues were considered the purview of advocacy organizations and the private sector tended to be reluctant to take a strong stance because of fears they would alienate customers. This is no longer sufficient. Today's consumer and employee expectations are changing. There are very real benefits to staying ahead of the curve and engaging issues - and very real consequences for companies that prefer to stay neutral.

This is a newer expectation for companies and one that does not come naturally. A large number of companies made racial justice statements in the summer of 2020, with varying degrees of public reception. Some, like Nike, were well received because of the brand's previous support of Colin Kaepernick and other athlete protests. Other companies were criticized for offering statements without tangible action.

Consumer expectations for this type of engagement will only grow as Millennials and Gen Z age into the workforce and gain more buying power in the market. Gone are the days when companies (and nonprofits!) could get away with basic, empty statements - or with saying nothing. In a fast-changing world, companies must engage or be left behind.

3. Generational Change

Millennials have been cast as one of the most 'disruptive' generations in US history and Gen Z appears poised to intensify that disruption. Born after 1981, these two generations grew up during a time defined by major cultural change. Older Millennials came of age during 9/11, getting their first jobs just as the Great Recession hit in 2008. Now the younger generations are graduating, launching careers and raising families against the backdrop of a worldwide pandemic. Millennials are the first 'digital natives' - and Gen Z can't even recall a world without cell phones, Netflix and wi-fi available 24/7.

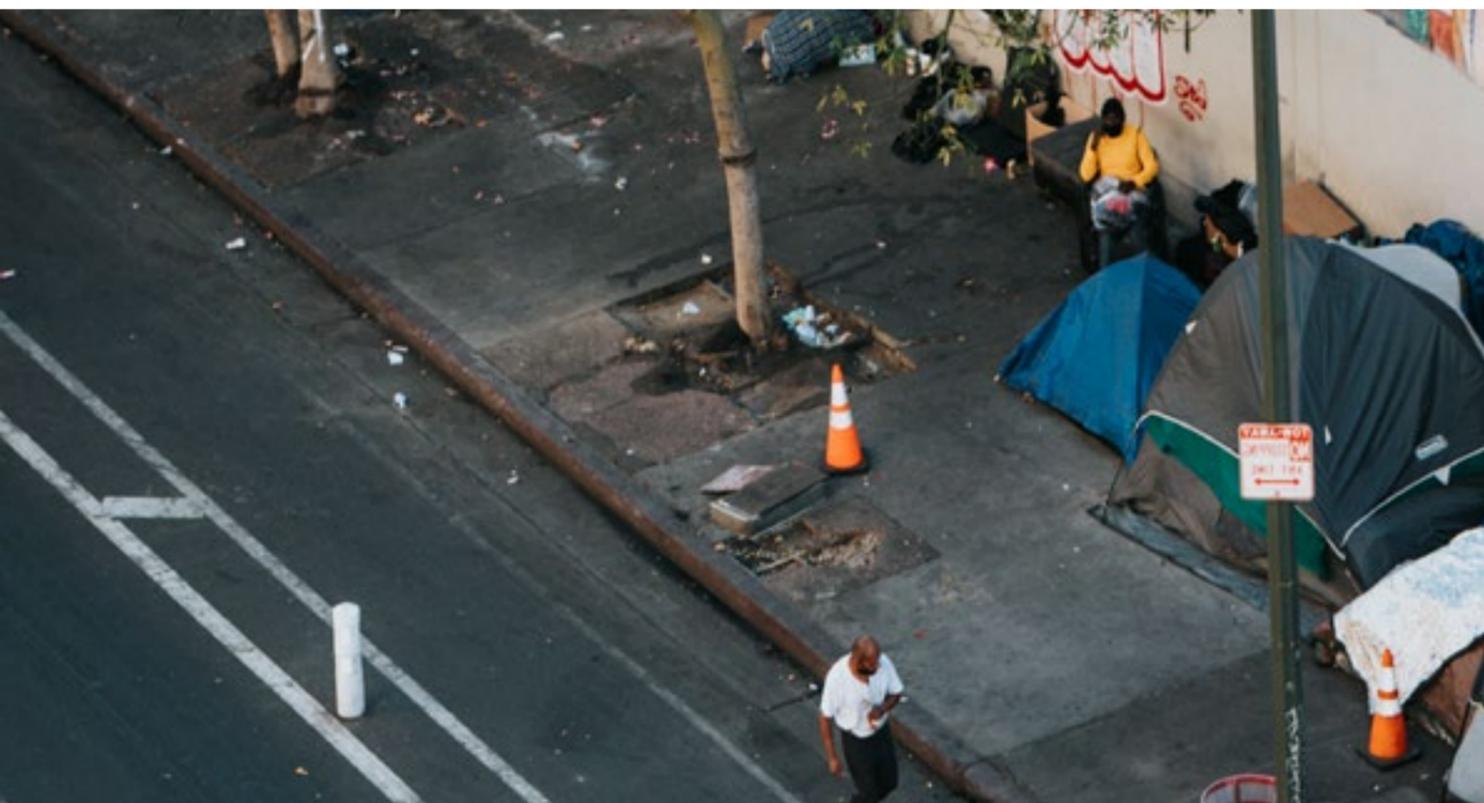
It's no wonder these generations are seen as so disruptive.

Millennials and Gen Z are widely considered the most socially conscious generations ever, but the way they perceive giving back is notably different from the ways their parents and grandparents engaged in social good.

Overall, millennials are interested in systemic change and are far more committed to a cause itself, rather than an organization. According to The Millennial Impact Report, 90% of millennials are motivated to give by a compelling mission, not the organization itself - and 90% of those same millennials would stop giving if they stopped trusting an organization. This loyalty means that younger generations are often willing to give and donate across a range of organizations oriented around a cause they care about most.

It is this same bend towards systemic change that inspires younger generations to perceive a larger range of actions as their contribution to social good. In the past, donations and volunteer hours were the primary currency of social good. But younger generations include actions like voting, changing their buying habits and sharing content as equally important to social change.

They want these social good habits integrated into their daily lives. Younger consumers expect the brands they use to be socially aware and responsible. They want their employers to support a workplace culture that prioritizes diversity and inclusion, a sense of purpose and a focus on community. These generational shifts are even showing up in the culture of shareholders and is informing how investors shape their retirement portfolios. Companies are taking notice.



Nearly 60% of US consumers want the companies they engage to take a stand on issues of racial justice, climate change and more.¹

Source: [The Corporate Social Mind](#)



The Case For Social Good

The pace of these changes is only going to speed up, fueled by technology and changing public opinion. Business has long had a role to play in the social good of a community – but what if social good has a role to play in the health of a business? For too long, we've viewed profit and purpose as mutually exclusive concepts. Many organizations want what is best for the community, but these efforts are often siloed – and 'staying in our lane' hasn't gotten us very far.

The stewards of social good in our community are unquestionably the 501c3 nonprofit organizations with missions focused on improving society for all who live here. Nonprofit ideals, knowledge and commitment paired with business efficiency, acumen and dollars creates a powerful combination. This intersection has the ability to create significant change for our community, but we have to be willing to examine our own organizations and write a new rulebook.

Some of the companies interviewed for this study were challenged to admit that business needs inside their companies were significant drivers of their investment in social good, remaining committed to vetted cause marketing messaging about 'giving back' to the community, even behind closed doors. The sooner companies acknowledge that they need nonprofits as platforms for engagement as much as (if not more than) the nonprofits need them as a source of financial support, the sooner dying structures of 'corporate sponsorship' can evolve into a true expression of partnership.

We believe that tearing down walls between businesses, nonprofits, government and faith communities will not only strengthen our community – it will strengthen our organizations through shared purpose and drive. Our institutions have already changed, fueled in large part by the people who work there.

With the 2021 iteration of the Social Good Report, Next Stage has examined this intersection of profit and purpose through in-depth primary and secondary research, and we've arrived at a framework for further exploration – four primary thematic headings with 12 drivers of bottom-line serving impact creating intersectionality between the private sector and nonprofits. On the pages that follow, we have summarized in a snapshot the high-level findings that are unpacked in greater detail in the full report.

Let us be clear: **we don't think nonprofits alone are the solution.** But we do think it is high time we broke down silos between the private sector and nonprofits and invented something new.

Our examination sought to uncover a potential win-win-win framework – solutions to challenges facing companies, resources to drive the business models of nonprofits, and positive outcomes for our community that lead to substantive change to the status quo.

In the end, companies that seek out these intersections and leverage social good to improve both the community and their own bottom line will reap the benefits – or they will ignore it at their own peril.



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CHAPTER SUMMARIES



DRIVE YOUR BRAND WITH VALUES CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Social good can help companies form authentic relationships with consumers, who are more concerned that ever with the way brands engage the world.

Brand Engagement

1. Consumers increasingly view their purchases through the lens of impact and social activism. Social good helps brands engage with customers through an **alignment of shared values**.
2. Transactional expressions of brand are no longer enough. Digital connectedness demands quality content and companies seeking **differentiation** to build brand 'stickiness.'
3. Authenticity is the hallmark of brands that are built to last. Companies can look to the nonprofit sector to find earnest, human-centered brand partners that foster **genuine relationship**.

Case Study Authentic Brand Relationships at Giordana Cycling Apparel

Cause Marketing

1. Slapping logos on t-shirts and calling it cause marketing is a thing of the past. Savvy companies are looking for a **strong value proposition** in nonprofits they engage with, and smart nonprofits are getting creative in fulfillment strategies.
2. Companies engage in nonprofit cause marketing partnerships because it builds **authentic alignment**, which is the secret power social good organizations need to do a better job of packaging and leveraging.
3. Nonprofits with **large, influential constituencies** can offer more than brand alignment to partner companies. Nonprofits have fervent followers with transferrable potential when the engagement is done well.

Case Study Employees as Brand Ambassadors at OrthoCarolina

Network Development

1. Companies should aspire to show up as an authentic **expression of an employee's identity**. Nonprofits can play a triangulating role for companies to build expressions of workforce pride.
2. Nonprofits can help businesses incentivize community engagement, turning day-of-service volunteerism into a more **meaningful experience** that taps into the personal passions of employees.
3. Nonprofit board service is an old strategy that has had new life as younger employees seek ways to lead in community, form network connections based on shared values and pursue **relational marketing** that spans traditional boundaries.

Case Study Relational Marketing Through Board Service at GreerWalker





CREATE A CULTURE THAT STICKS CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Social good can serve as an expression of company identity that clearly aligns values with actions.

Employee Engagement

1. Employees increasingly expect their values to be expressed in the workplace through personal care. Nonprofits can offer **value-aligned** social good expressions driven from the bottom up.
2. While collective engagement is often the goal of workplace volunteerism, smart companies encourage the **individual passions** of employees, nurtured through collaborations with nonprofits.
3. Employees crave social good interaction that broadens perspectives, deepens understanding, and above all creates change. Nonprofits can bring these authentic **social good experiences** inside the walls of a company.

Case Study A Culture of Purpose at Sunlight Financial

Employee Wellbeing

1. The **emotional wellbeing** of the workforce is a top-of-mind challenge for companies. Social good engagement can be a salve for stress and nonprofits can be vendors of these emotional releases.
2. Companies can **gamify healthy attitudes** through cause-related engagement that leads to a healthier workforce. Nonprofits can create fun, values-centric ways to encourage fitness while driving positive community outcomes.
3. The concept of **community health** became very real during a pandemic where access to healthcare for all became an issue of personal risk. Nonprofits were important conduits for companies during the crisis and can be strategic partners moving forward.

Case Study Exploring the Criticalness of Employee Wellness with Willis Towers Watson

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI)

1. Companies have struggled to find their **advocacy voice** on the topic of DEI. Stakeholders are demanding proof of commitment, and investments in the nonprofit sector can put words into action.
2. Designing and implementing strategies to combat inequity requires **expertise**, and Charlotte has a number of knowledgeable DEI consultants, thought leaders and nonprofits positioned to offer high-quality services.
3. Companies already engaged in social good are realizing the importance of making investments in equity-centered organizations committed to **inside-out** solutions that directly partner with the communities they aim to help.

Case Study A Moment of Equity Reckoning in the Queen City



BUILD A NEXT GENERATION WORKFORCE CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Social good can strengthen the talent pipeline through development, education and training.

Talent Recruitment

1. Building a workplace culture focused on social good starts with committing to **values-driven** hiring. Today's top talent is equally likely to evaluate the company for its own values and community engagement.
2. While salary and benefits will remain a top priority during the hiring process, younger talent is very focused on **work-life balance**. Offering time away to engage with nonprofits is an old strategy with renewed purpose.
3. The talent shortage in many industries requires companies to aggressively compete for a small talent pool or consider **non-traditional hiring sources**. Nonprofits can be ideal partners for growing a new talent pipeline.

Case Study Attracting Talent Through Social Good at Wray Ward

Workforce Pipeline

1. The business needs of local employers are an opportunity to reach into community to create **new streams of talent**. Navigating local resources may be a challenge for HR teams, but nonprofits can partner on effective strategies.
2. Selecting a nonprofit partner for a workforce strategy is not unlike other types of strategic partnerships. Smart companies build relationships with their nonprofit partners to **ensure a strong fit**.
3. It takes time for workforce pipelines to mature. **Mentorship** and **apprenticeship programs** are not a quick fix, but persistence, patience and time bring big rewards.

Case Study Building an Equity-Informed Talent Pipeline at Torrent Consulting

Professional Development

1. Engaging in volunteerism with nonprofits is a strong way to **develop the skills** of a company's workforce, as leadership, problem-solving and team building are framed by community need.
2. If companies thought Millennials were disruptive, wait until they meet Gen Z. Often called the **'Founder Generation,'** these employees are competitive, fast-moving and natural risk-takers who see in emerging nonprofit leaders a kinship. This is a natural alignment to explore.
3. Younger workers are conscious of **representation** in ways that previous generations seldom considered. Engaging with social good is an opportunity to put their experiences into practice in service to community.

Case Study Launching Community-Focused Professional Development at Moore & Van Allen





DESIGN A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Social good can help companies develop sustainable business practices that keep economic growth, social mobility and environmental health front and center.

Economic Sustainability

1. Growing local talent starts well upstream of workforce development. Nonprofits focused on ensuring access to early care and education and **nurturing children** into adulthood are early partners in the local talent pipeline.
2. Companies can activate the local economy through the **supply chain**, a powerful ally in the effort to address economic mobility. Nonprofits can be important brokers as champions of local businesses, particularly when considering inclusive practices.
3. Though Charlotte is a national banking center, there are surprisingly few efforts focused on **entrepreneurship**. Nonprofits focused on local entrepreneurship can assist with implementing community-based strategies.

Case Study Charting Economic Access for Hispanic/Latino Entrepreneurs at Bank of America

Social Mobility

1. Companies involved in social impact strategies are recognizing the important role **community-based organizations** play in leveraging trust. This requires businesses to build new relationships to advance their social impact efforts.
2. A recurring gripe is the lack of **collaboration** between nonprofits. Encouraging formal partnerships is an opportunity for the corporate community that often provides financial support across multiple areas of focus.
3. No single financial commitment will change a systemic problem. But companies that adopt a posture of **multi-year investments** in nonprofits encourage increased risk-taking and pilots that lead to breakthroughs.

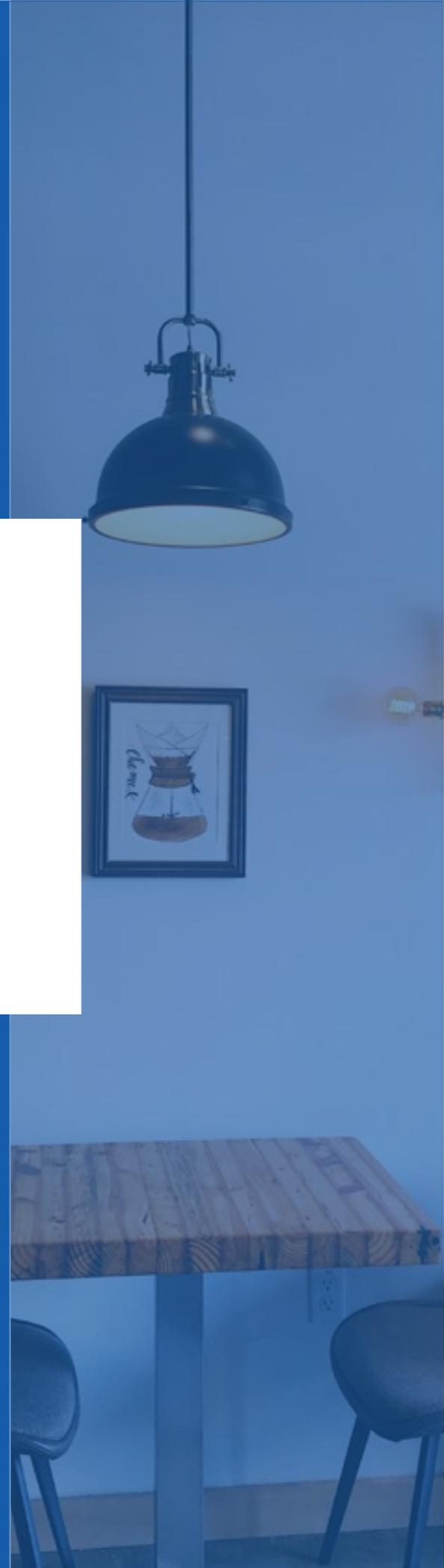
Case Study Bridging the Digital Divide with AvidXchange

Environmental Sustainability

1. Many companies point to their Green Teams – employee-led internal resource groups – when asked about environmental stewardship. Research suggests employees want more than **surface-level expressions** and nonprofits can offer tangible solutions.
2. Building a bottom-up culture starts with encouraging employees to ‘live their values’ at work. **Employee education and engagement strategies** are ways employers can work with nonprofits to design effective solutions that move beyond slogans.
3. **Smart growth** is a hot topic in the Queen City, as the city debates the Charlotte Future 2040 Comprehensive Plan. Employers, aided by nonprofits, can activate strategies that lead to a more livable community.

Case Study Building a Sustainable Development with Crescent Communities

DRIVE YOUR BRAND WITH VALUES



DRIVE YOUR BRAND WITH VALUES

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

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Brand Engagement

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Section One:

DRIVE YOUR BRAND WITH VALUES

“PEOPLE DON'T BUY WHAT YOU DO - THEY BUY WHY YOU DO IT.”
- Simon Sinek

For years, nonprofits and businesses have sought to leverage the brand capital of the other. For nonprofits, the value proposition seems simple - aligning with businesses (the bigger, the better!) would introduce their organization to fresh eyes, attracting donors, sponsors and board members. For businesses, affiliating with a charitable organization enables them to reap the benefits of being associated with a positive community force. The reality is not quite as simple.

The brand landscape is changing, driven by technology and younger consumers. Price, convenience and quality have always been main drivers of a brand. If a company produced a good product and had strong marketing channels, it was a proven recipe for success. But today's business and retail customers expect more.

The 2018 Edelman Earned Brand study cites the rise of belief-driven buyers. Based on their research, nearly 64% of consumers choose, switch, avoid or boycott a brand based on its stand on societal issues - and this number rises every year.² While this trend started with Millennial and Gen Z buyers, the increase in belief-drive buyers is rising in every age category and is consistent across income levels, making it clear that values matter more than ever.

Breaking Down Brand Silos

Like many corporate-nonprofit partnerships, brand and marketing projects have traditionally been siloed, following a well-worn path.

Often oriented around events or awareness months, the cause marketing proposal became a tried and true dance between nonprofit fundraising departments and corporate marketing professionals. Sponsorships were traded for exposure, and cause marketing partnerships were designed to get more customers in the door.

This type of partnership can be hard to quantify - and while it can certainly create awareness, it is not always the kind an organization may want. Few organizations, nonprofit or corporate, have branded themselves as successfully as the Susan G. Komen Foundation. The pink ribbon is instantly recognizable and their efforts spawned a range of both grassroots and corporate efforts supporting breast cancer. But as their partnerships grew, the organization faced some tough questions about their partners' mission alignment. In 2010, KFC was widely panned for partnering with Komen on their 'Buckets for a Cure' campaign due to the fast food chain's link to weight gain and poorer health outcomes for women. The partnership got a lot of press, but the majority of it was not positive.³ Other partnerships don't have such obvious conflicts, but they also lack alignment that would make them powerful and increase media and consumer awareness.

The real value of brand partnerships between social good organizations and corporations is their power to drive trust and create authentic connections built on shared values. As nonprofits and businesses partner to increase brand awareness and expand their customer bases, these are the guiding trends that will define the way forward.

Nearly 64% of consumers choose, switch, avoid or boycott a brand based on its stand on societal issues



The New Rules

1. Consumers want relationships with their favorite brands.

Driven in large part by social media, today's consumers want direct engagement with the brands they frequent. In previous generations, the marketing and brand industry was defined by rooms of marketing professionals brainstorming the best new ad campaign, designed to capture consumer attention through radio, TV or print ads. Companies communicated with their target audience through a one-way conversation, hoping their latest campaign would be enough to persuade and sell through a narrow range of distribution channels. In those days, nonprofit-corporate partnerships offered additional avenues for valuable exposure.

As social media evolved and content channels became more varied, buyers became savvier. Take Millennials for example, who came of age in a marketing-focused world. One 2014 study showed that more than 84% of Millennials don't trust advertising at all.⁴

Widening content channels have shifted the power dynamic between consumers and brands over the last 15 years, offering buyers more choice about how they are getting information and what information they consider reliable. For mid-sized and smaller organizations, this democratization of information has opened brand and marketing engagement that was formerly unavailable to them. It is no longer necessarily a matter of which brand has the largest advertising budget, but who has the ability to reach their target audience most authentically.

Consumers now crave authentic relationships and valuable information from the organizations they patronize and support. This can play out as an engaging social campaign, a useful piece of content, or a discount or donation campaign. Regardless of the form it takes, today's advertising environment is focused on digital channels and nimbleness, where authenticity and direct engagement trump all.

2. Brand loyalty starts on the inside.

Local brand expert Greg Johnson identifies internal brand loyalty as the most critical piece of any brand - and often the most overlooked. "Your internal team are your best brand ambassadors and they are going to tell a story - you just want to make sure it's the right story," said Johnson, Managing Director of Orbital Socket. Businesses often focus so much time and energy marketing to other businesses and consumers that companies often miss that the stories employees tell can be a brand's biggest asset - or its biggest liability.

In a highly competitive landscape, this impacts not only consumer spending, but also talent recruitment. In the past, a company's brand was considered the purview of marketing and was oriented primarily around a company's product or service. It was a fairly simple formula - if a brand had a strong product and strong marketing channels, it was likely to be well-received. But the democratization of media has impacted more than brand engagement.

In today's culture, values-based branding is becoming increasingly important. Millennial and Gen Z buyers expect the companies they purchase from to stand for something and will do the research to ensure that a company's public stance is consistent with its business practices. If they find that internal values and practices do not align with external statements, many are willing to walk away - likely to never return.

3. Brand loyalty is social activism.

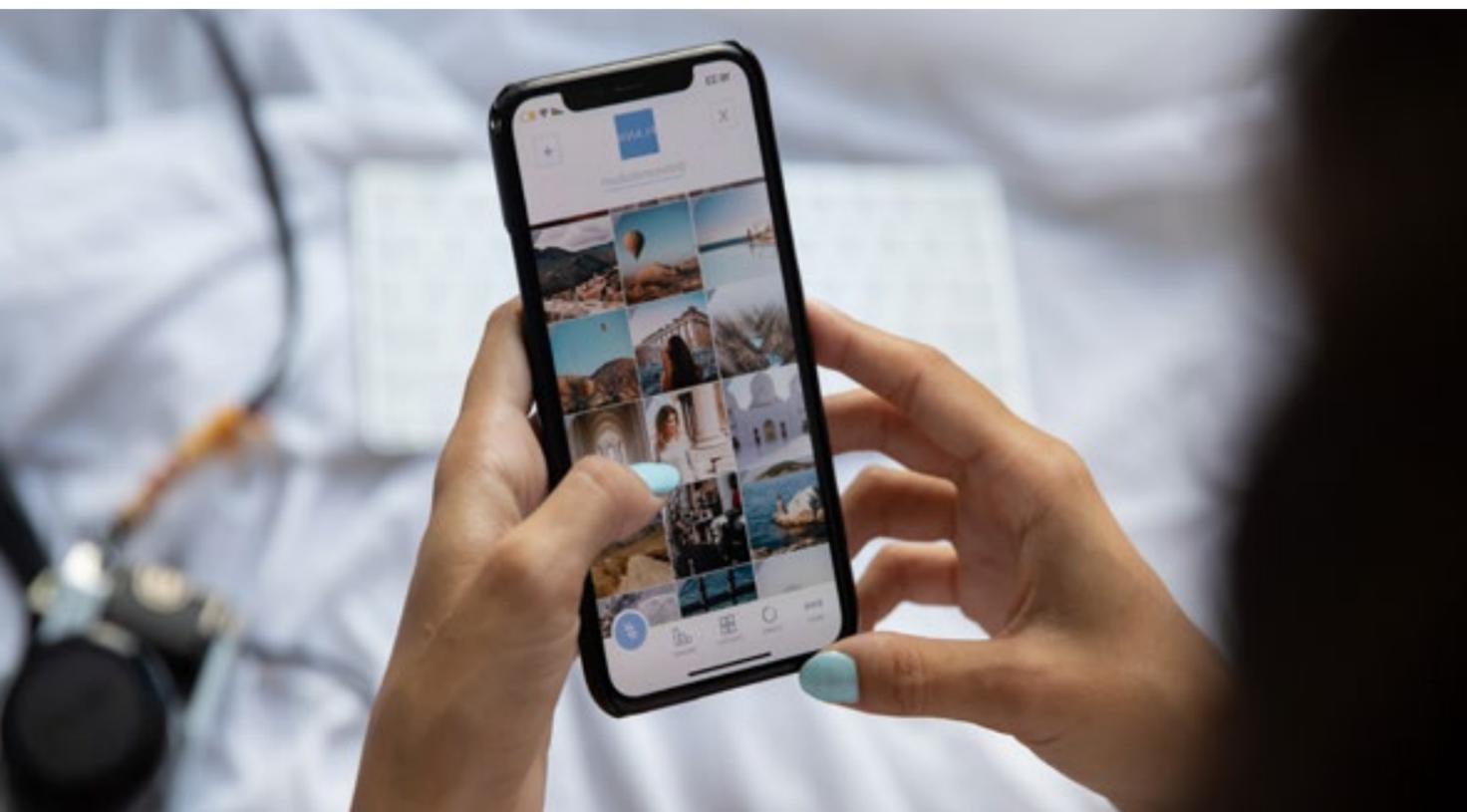
As buyers engage with brands, they are increasingly concerned with how that organization interacts with the world. Millennial and Gen Z buyers are particularly interested in systemic impact and they want to know that their buying power - including

charitable donations - is a force for good in the world. Unlike previous generations, younger people don't believe their social impact is limited to the donations they make to charity each year. Many of these consumers weigh actions such as voting and buying from socially responsible brands as equally important as giving.

These socially-motivated buyers are willing to pay more for a service or contract if they know it aligns with their own values. Brands such as Grove Collaborative and Patagonia are staking their brand awareness on social issues - and it's working. Concerned with both environmental and sustainability issues, these companies have seen an increase in market share, even though their products are more expensive than competitors.

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd and racial justice protests, many buyers responded by intentionally purchasing from Black-owned businesses as a way to tangibly show support. Local business owner Abigail Glen has always centered diverse stories as a core value of her business, Shelves Bookstore. "When the protests happened, we got a flood of orders for books about racial justice and demand for Black authors increased," she said. "We've always stood for what we stand for - and it put us in a position to meet the needs of readers through our business. I'm not trying to save the world, but I do want my business to be in a position to serve as a resource for readers and dreamers."

This kind of activism requires authentic relationships and day-to-day engagement with a company's values. Consumers are increasingly savvy and want to see more authentic partnerships between their favorite brands and their favorite social causes. Gone are the days when a company could put out a press release about a big donation to a charity and reap maximum benefits. Instead, nonprofits offer businesses authentic engagement into communities they hope to impact.



Unlike previous generations, younger people don't believe their social impact is limited to the donations they make to charity each year.

Chapter One: Brand Engagement

Social good creates a 'stickiness' to brands that inspires loyalty among buyers who increasingly want to know that their favored brands are creating good - not harm - in the world. Nonprofit-corporate brand partnerships have the ability to create authentic connections and relationships built on shared values.

Not surprisingly, the rise of social media has amplified the importance of social good to a company's brand, and nonprofits are wise to use savvy social media strategy as they court the next generation as a constituency.

This mash-up of "consumerism and cause" has created a tricky framework for professional marketers to master. Authenticity remains a critical differentiator as the public becomes more astute at separating fact from fiction online.

While brand development through cause has been in the toolkit of brand marketers of business-to-consumer companies for decades, more and more business-to-business companies are recognizing that how they show up in community is important. As you will read later in this report, talent acquisition now starts with social media.



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1. Start with 'why.'

The most effective brand partnerships form when both organizations understand what they want to get out of the partnership. This requires a degree of self-examination on the part of both the company and the nonprofit to define the intersection - why do these two brands work well together?

The 24 Foundation knew that the strength of Giordana's brand would expose their cancer-fighting mission to an even greater number of cyclists. The strongest relationships form when both parties clearly identify goals and audiences.

2. Throw away the sponsorship grids.

Gone are the days when nonprofits could approach a company with a carefully crafted sponsorship grid and land a partnership after a single pitch. Effective partnerships are born from honest conversation, alignment of goals and collaborative brainstorming. When organizations build partnerships based on their 'why' it opens the door for a more creative deployment of resources.

ArtPop Founder & Executive Director Wendy Hickey agrees that collaboration and trust are key elements of success. A former marketing professional, Hickey helps connect local artists with companies for special projects. "It's about finding the right fit for the artist and the company and it all hinges on a trusting partnership. We listen carefully to a company's needs, then connect them with an artist in our network. The end result is always beautiful, accessible public art."

3. Create authentic connections.

When relationships are built on authentic connection, it frequently carries over to the partnership's activation. With research showing that engagement is more important to consumers than ever before, creating opportunity for these intersections is what separates a good partnership from a great one.

At Carolina Raptor Center's new Quest Center at Latta Nature Preserve, Duke Energy sponsored the organization's amphitheater with a critical \$400,000 investment that not only named it for the company but will also activate company employees to serve as volunteer ushers for special events. Creating an activation point for corporate sponsorship is a hallmark of the Quest project, with Carolina Raptor Center designing unique opportunities in partnership with companies to ensure high-quality engagement.



It's about finding the right fit for the artist and the company and it all hinges on a trusting partnership. We listen carefully to a company's needs, then connect them with an artist in our network. The end result is always beautiful, accessible public art."

- ArtPop Founder & Executive Director Wendy Hickey

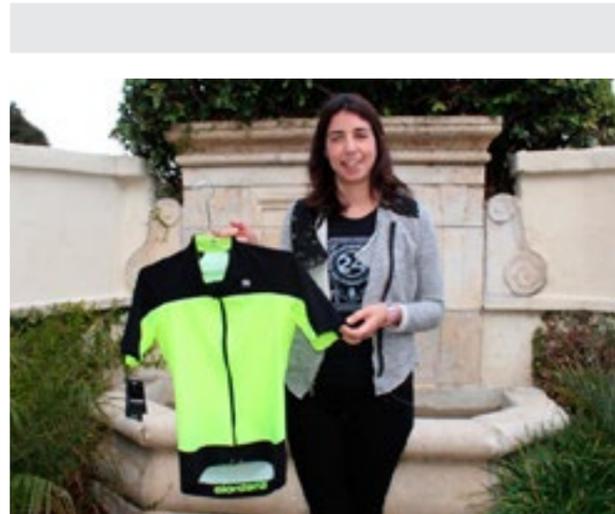
Case Study: Authentic Brand Relationships at Giordana Cycling Apparel

Stand on the Booty Loop in late July and you'll see 1,500 cyclists lining up for Charlotte's much-loved 24 Foundation's 24-hour cycling event that benefits local cancer charities. The cyclists whizzing by are a colorful blur of spandex, outfitted in their team jerseys. Many of those jerseys were produced by a distributor right here in Charlotte.

Giordana Cycling Apparel is a globally known brand that often flies under the local radar. They distribute professionally-crafted Italian cycling gear and apparel across the country, including their own apparel line and custom gear for cycling organizations such as International Pro Tour cycling teams.

The mid-sized, family-owned company is known for its exceptional customer service and has long focused on building an inclusive brand that welcomes everyone to the sport, from the newest cyclist to the seasoned professional. Company Founder Giorgio Andretta named the company after his oldest daughter, shortly after she was born. "He tells me that he thought of the most beautiful name in the world once - he didn't need to do it again," laughs Giordana Andretta, who now serves as the company's vice president.

The family atmosphere is clear when you walk in the office doors. Many of their employees have 10+ year tenures at the company with no plans to leave. Pre-pandemic afternoon bike rides and lunchtime yoga were regular activities and several people have expressed that they can't wait to get back into the office. The team takes care of each other - and they consider customers family too.



Photos courtesy of Giordana Cycling Apparel

“Authenticity is important in our family and our business and we extend that to our customers,” said Andretta. “We treat the order for a \$10 cycling cap as equal to an order from a big ecommerce retailer. It doesn’t always make sense, but we feel like it’s so important to cultivate a community of people who love the sport like we do.”



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This authenticity extends into Giordana Apparels’ brand and marketing efforts. “We want to do what we already know, but do it in a way that benefits the community,” said Andretta. Giordana is regularly approached with sponsorship proposals from nonprofit events, but Andretta acknowledges that the company is selective about who they work with. “For us, it’s not about putting our name on the back of a t-shirt for an amount of money. Our product has value - it’s high end. If an organization appreciates that, then it’s the right fit, but we commit high level resources to these partnerships and we want to make sure that we are getting to a customer base that is aligned with our needs as well.”

The company found a long-term match as they cultivated a partnership with the 24 Foundation. The cycling event attracts a range of cyclists, from beginning families to more elite cyclists and teams. This inclusive, family-focused atmosphere appealed to Andretta and her family - and so did the customer base. Giordana provides gear for the 24 Foundation’s top fundraisers and discounts for teams creating custom jerseys. Giordana also sponsors one of the largest event fundraising teams in honor of a longtime friend who passed away from cancer, raising more than \$200,000 over the last 15 years. For many years, Andretta served on the organization’s board of directors.

“The 24 Foundation’s partnership with Giordana is so important and valuable to our organization,” said Katy Ryan, Executive Director of the 24 Foundation. “They have an incredible commitment to cancer survivorship, along with a really smart approach to their sponsorship. Every piece of their engagement is authentic and many of our riders feel so loyal to their brand.”

Chapter Two: Cause Marketing

We have all participated in them, whether we like it or not. “Vote for your favorite nonprofit” emails show up in your email in-box or social media feed, sponsored by a local brand that hopes your passion for specific organizations will lead to brand exposure. With encouragement to “vote every day,” these transactional marketing campaigns may successfully activate the passion of a nonprofit’s constituency but have the potential to exhaust people.

Thankfully, these early cause marketing efforts are giving way to something more intentional. Marketing has become much more content-driven in all ways and leveraging causes is no exception.

These days, it is not uncommon to find advertising on all platforms that focuses on human-centered storytelling.

It’s also time for nonprofits to shift their mindset on cause marketing. Gone are the days when a single sponsorship proposal featuring a table loaded with benefits would suffice. Companies benefit from building a relationship with targeted audience segments, and when these goals align with a nonprofit’s assets and goals, the resulting partnership can be powerful for both parties.



Gone are the days when a single sponsorship proposal featuring a table loaded with benefits would suffice.

Photo courtesy of OrthoCarolina



TAKE ACTION

1. Identify a clear value proposition - for both organizations.

Brand awareness used to be the main value proposition for many nonprofit-corporate partnerships. Event signage and logos on t-shirts were the primary currency, and the more money a company gave, the larger their logo presence would be. While general awareness remains important, brands and consumers are now seeking more authentic, aligned partnerships that target specific business needs.

Blanket logo placement can sometimes backfire, like the KFC and breast cancer partnership we cited in the last chapter. But when companies and nonprofits can clearly identify what they need, a clear partnership often follows.

This requires nonprofits to care as much about how their company partners are presented as they do their own brand. In this way, the nonprofit is a vendor of brand development services and slapping a logo on something and calling it sponsorship fulfillment simply does not suffice anymore. The dollars are increasingly going to nonprofits that demonstrate creative and effective communication of the value proposition of their partners.

2. Know thy constituency.

Most companies pondering a partnership with a nonprofit are circumspect about the organization’s audience. Too many nonprofits are unable to describe the attributes of the people who follow them on social media or are inside their databases. Companies have become accustomed to having to do the heavy lifting to leverage the partnership to their own audiences.

This is a huge miss for nonprofits and companies both. Nonprofits do themselves a disservice when they cannot accurately describe their followership

and constituencies, devaluing what they bring to the table. Consequently, companies miss opportunities to realize how they can leverage that devotion through brand alignment, which in turn decreases the value of partnership.

Nonprofits that succeed in winning strong cause marketing dollars are sophisticated in what they know about the people that engage with them. This includes having up-to-date detail including demographics, engagement activity and preference data. In turn, companies should consider how savvy nonprofits could play a role in amplifying their marketing strategies.

3. Look for authentic alignment.

Consumers are savvy to the way corporate brands show up in nonprofit spaces and do not want to feel manipulated. Forced partnerships can create more backlash than value. Consider Pepsi’s ad with Kendall Jenner following protests for racial justice. The company attempted to capitalize on the Black Lives Matter movement and featured Jenner ‘solving’ tensions with police with a single can of Pepsi. Backlash was swift and critical - rather than work with an authentic partner to create change, the brand had attempted to profit by using the popularity of that cause in advertising. Pepsi pulled the ad and later issued an apology.

This played out locally last summer when a local bakery and coffee shop promised to donate a portion of sales to local activist groups, but had not reached out to the groups to form partnerships or donate funds. The backlash was swift and targeted.⁵

Authentic partnerships form in the context of relationships and focus on what can bring value to both organizations - as well as consumers. These types of partnerships don’t always develop quickly; it takes genuine understanding of business models and challenges for both organizations. But when formed well, they can be powerful and long-lasting.

Case Study: Employees as Brand Ambassadors at OrthoCarolina

A veteran of the advertising and media industry, John Searby now serves as the Executive Director of the Catawba Riverkeeper Foundation and a tireless advocate for local conservancy causes. When Searby was connected with Blair Primis, Senior VP of Marketing & Talent Management at OrthoCarolina, he knew he'd found a kindred spirit. The pair each admired the other's innovative approach and knew they wanted to work together - but they initially struggled to find an idea that served both of their needs.

Rather than a sponsorship proposal, the partnership was formed on a mutually respectful relationship as they learned more about the other's business model and challenges. It took months, but they eventually landed on the perfect cause marketing partnership. "We didn't need our logo splashed in front of thousands of people," said Primis. "That doesn't typically help us attract patients to clinics. What we need is exposure to a certain type of person." When the pair realized that kayakers - a large part of Catawba Riverkeeper's constituency - often suffered from rotator cuff problems, they knew they had something.

"One of the doctors in our practice is an avid kayaker, so it just made sense to form a partnership based on common interest and need," said Primis. OrthoCarolina agreed to sponsor a series of weekend workshops for kayakers on the river, where the doctor would teach kayakers how to preserve their shoulders and paddle more safely. The teaching sessions were recorded and shared with kayakers before they got on the water, ensuring a safe and fun trip. The doctor even jumped in and joined the group for a trip down the river.

It was a win for both parties. "It added value for our members, provided funding for our program and aligned with our regular weekend activities," said Searby. For OrthoCarolina, it introduced their services to a targeted group of potential customers. The partnership felt authentic to everyone involved. "We don't believe in sponsorships - we believe in partnership" said Primis. "For it to create wins for everyone, it has to make sense for everyone involved."



Photo courtesy of Catawba Riverkeeper

“We don’t believe in sponsorships - we believe in partnership” said Primis. “For it to create wins for everyone, it has to make sense for everyone involved.”

Photo courtesy of GreerWalker

Chapter Three: Network Development

Charlotte has changed in innumerable ways over the last few decades with an influx of new people who “aren’t from around here.” In previous generations, business leaders were likely to know each other both professionally and socially, seeing each other at community events, shopping at neighborhood stores, and in church on Sunday. These days, there is no longer a dependence on a “center of town” mentality or select institutions to do the work of helping build relationships.

If ‘people buy from people’ remains a truism, then companies should naturally care about how their workers build their networks, particularly employees involved in sales and client relations. The baby boomer generation was more inclined to engage in formalized networking through professional associations, chambers of commerce and civic organizations like rotary clubs. Next generation employees are less likely to participate in perceived transactional expressions of networking, favoring instead to build their networks through shared expressions of identity. Before the pandemic disrupted gathering in person, Charlotte Meetup was robust with networks organized by interest and coworking facilities encouraged cross-pollination.

Getting outside one’s normal network is a benefit of alignment with nonprofit organizations. The nonprofit can serve as an active platform upon which a rising executive can build both formal and informal relationships that result in positive reputation, a multifaceted network of relationships and yes, even sales leads.

“Next generation employees are less likely to participate in perceived transactional expressions of networking, favoring instead to build their networks through shared expressions of identity.”



TAKE ACTION

1. Foster alignment with the company as relational marketing.

If there is an argument for a new town center in Charlotte, it must surely be found online through social and digital media. Facebook and Instagram engagement are expressions of identity for employees through the breweries they visit, the hiking trails they discover and the events they attend.

Companies should aspire to show up in their employees' social media feeds. When workers have pride for where they work, they are more likely to integrate their employer as an expression of personal identity. In Next Stage's survey of next generation employees, participants were asked to rank a variety of factors to their job satisfaction. Near the top of the list was "strong values that show up in how we conduct business."

Nonprofits can play a triangulating role for companies as a means to build expressions of workforce pride and engagement. When an employee posts a learning on Twitter from a nonprofit lunch-and-learn hosted by management, a photo on Instagram of a volunteer outing sponsored by the employer, or a corporate media release on LinkedIn about a new nonprofit sponsorship, employees are expressing themselves through the company.

2. Incentivize engagement with social good.

As church attendance in America declines, Millennials and Gen Z are searching for new ways to engage in community and give back. Volunteerism with nonprofits can serve as this new point of identity and engagement. Next generation employees are as likely to discover new friendships through a shared interest in a social cause as they are through alumni networks or household proximity.

Larger companies in the Charlotte area have long prioritized day-of-service volunteerism as a means to get their workforce out en masse, with corporate logo t-shirts resulting in strong photo ops and a fleeting sense of values being put into practice. But employees desire more meaning in how they show up in community roles, and a company's brand can benefit when that passion for social cause is authentic.

Smart companies provide an incentive for their employees to take the time needed to engage in personal passions. Many corporations provide monthly or annual paid time off for volunteerism while others make a financial contribution to the organizations where their employees are engaged, sometimes based on the number of hours volunteered. Not only is the employee engaging in relational marketing as an ambassador of the company, they are also likely building new relationships that could drive revenue or decrease expenses.

3. Encourage volunteer service and leadership.

Companies can and should encourage their employees to bring their skills to bear on behalf of nonprofit organizations through task forces, committees and board service. Nonprofits are eager to attract volunteers who are passionate about their missions while also finding inroads to area companies. Nonprofits benefit from the network developed through volunteers, and in turn, those volunteers can benefit from the network grown through the nonprofit.

Volunteer engagement is an old strategy experiencing new life as next generation employees seek ways to both lead in community while also networking amongst professionals with shared values. For some companies, this can be a core marketing strategy. Serving as speakers in community forums and sharing testimonials of social impact can lead to personal brand building for employees that also strengthen the brand of the company where they work.

Case Study: Relational Marketing Through Board Service at GreerWalker

If you work or volunteer for a nonprofit organization in the Charlotte region, you would be forgiven if you thought GreerWalker was a bigger CPA firm than it actually is. This is due in part to the considerable number of the firm's accountants who serve on nonprofit governing boards, very often in the role of Treasurer or Finance Committee Chair. A simple google search pulls up dozens of its partners serving as leadership volunteers in nonprofits large and small.

"It is a really big part of our firm," said Johnathan Mangels, and Partner at GreerWalker. "We have a strong community service culture that includes taking an active role through board service."

It is a tradition Mangels notes that stems from a strategy employed by cofounder Charlie Greer who alongside Kevin Walker launched GreerWalker in 1984 at a time when Charlotte was just starting to become a major player in financial management. As two hard-working accountants trying to get a foothold in the community, Greer found success getting to know business leaders through his service on nonprofit boards. The relational marketing paid off, and new recruits to the firm were encouraged to find an organization that aligned with a personal passion and get involved.

Across the Charlotte region, the board of directors of nonprofits are a unique way corporate executives can network and "boundary span" – get outside of the often narrow confines of an industry or profession to meet other community-connected leaders eager to engage in social good. The relationships do not lead to immediate sales leads or offers of contractual relationships, but they can help shape the personal brand of a rising executive that translates into increased connectedness.

At GreerWalker, this often leads to its partners and associates serving on the executive committee of many nonprofits across the region.

"People are our biggest marketing strategy and the worst thing you can do is get on a community board and be a bad board member," Mangels said. "So we encourage our colleagues to take the role seriously and to step up into leadership."

With 125 employees in Charlotte and a new office in Greenville, South Carolina, GreerWalker has built a social good brand through the volunteer service of its professionals, tapping into the latent spirit of community that is a hallmark of its workforce.

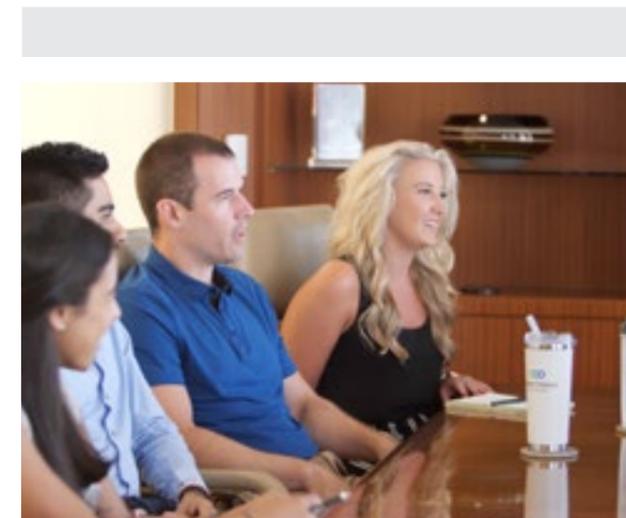


Photo courtesy of GreerWalker

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CREATE A CULTURE THAT STICKS



CREATE A CULTURE THAT STICKS CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Social good can serve as an expression of company identity that clearly aligns values with actions.

Employee Engagement

1. Employees increasingly expect their values to be expressed in the workplace through personal care. Nonprofits can offer **value-aligned** social good expressions driven from the bottom up.
2. While collective engagement is often the goal of workplace volunteerism, smart companies encourage the **individual passions** of employees, nurtured through collaborations with nonprofits.
3. Employees crave social good interaction that broadens perspectives, deepens understanding, and above all creates change. Nonprofits can bring these authentic **social good experiences** inside the walls of a company.

Case Study A Culture of Purpose at Sunlight Financial

Employee Wellbeing

1. The **emotional wellbeing** of the workforce is a top-of-mind challenge for companies. Social good engagement can be a salve for stress and nonprofits can be vendors of these emotional releases.
2. Companies can **gamify healthy attitudes** through cause-related engagement that leads to a healthier workforce. Nonprofits can create fun, values-centric ways to encourage fitness while driving positive community outcomes.
3. The concept of **community health** became very real during a pandemic where access to healthcare for all became an issue of personal risk. Nonprofits were important conduits for companies during the crisis and can be strategic partners moving forward.

Case Study Exploring the Criticalness of Employee Wellness with Willis Towers Watson

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI)

1. Companies have struggled to find their **advocacy voice** on the topic of DEI. Stakeholders are demanding proof of commitment, and investments in the nonprofit sector can put words into action.
2. Designing and implementing strategies to combat inequity requires **expertise**, and Charlotte has a number of knowledgeable DEI consultants, thought leaders and nonprofits positioned to offer high-quality services.
3. Companies already engaged in social good are realizing the importance of making investments in equity-centered organizations committed to **inside-out** solutions that directly partner with the communities they aim to help.

Case Study A Moment of Equity Reckoning in the Queen City



CREATE A CULTURE THAT STICKS

“CULTURE IS WHAT MOTIVATES AND RETAINS TALENTED EMPLOYEES.”
– Betty Thompson, Chief People Officer, Booz Allen Hamilton

There is a persistent myth that says Millennials are job-hoppers - unwilling to commit to one company for the long haul, ready to move on at the first sign of something new that piques their interest. For some workers under the age of 40, circumstances have made this true. Many graduated into one of the worst economies in modern history, facing layoffs early in their careers. Others cite the thriving gig economy as proof that younger workers lack interest or desire in long-tenured careers.

The data proves otherwise. According to the US Department of Labor Statistics, employees now stay longer at companies than they did 25 years ago, with the average tenure stretching from 3.5 years in 1983 to 4.6 years in 2014.⁶

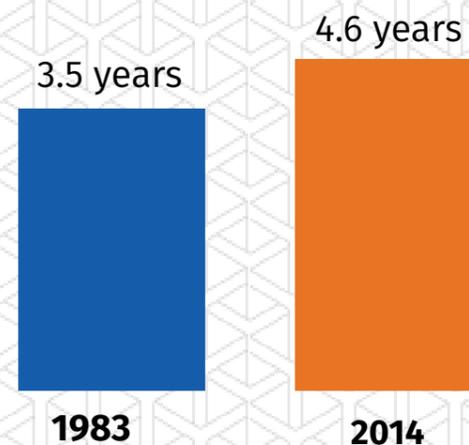
“I believe that Millennials are looking for reasons to stay at a company and desire to build long, stable careers,” said one local HR professional. “Companies often perceive younger employees as unworthy of investment due to the assumption that they only plan to stick around for one or two years, but given the right culture and professional investment, companies could cultivate relationships with employees who plan to stick around for the better part of their careers.”

Seeking Workplace Culture

While salary and benefits will always be a key factor in retaining talent, rising numbers of employees cite culture as the reason they stay or leave a company. In our survey of 350 Charlotte-based Millennials, 43% of respondents said they would definitely stay in a workplace culture they valued, rather than leave for a 5% increase in salary. This is consistent with national trends. A recent study by Glassdoor found that more than half of employees named company culture as more important than salary and that three in four job seekers evaluate culture before accepting an offer.⁷

With an ever-tightening labor market in many industries, employee retention is critical. Gallup estimates the cost of that employee’s annual salary - and that’s a conservative estimate.⁸ The reasons many employees leave relate directly to the type of culture businesses build, including work-life balance, physical and mental wellness, feeling valued in their job and a company’s commitment to its values. Companies that make culture a priority are likely to reap the benefits of longer retention.

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The New Rules

1. Work is a microcosm of community.

Employees increasingly value workplaces that craft an authentic community through both physical space and genuine care for their experience. Pre-COVID, the office had gone through an evolution. Many moved from cubicle farms to flexible, open environments with no specifically assigned spaces. Both methods had fans and critics, but neither often addressed the real issue - that employees craved spaces with authentic connection.

Former Pixar CEO Ed Catmull cited this sense of community as a key driver of the studio’s success, stating: “vibrant community where talented people are loyal to one another and their collective work, everyone feels that they are a part of something extraordinary, and their passion and accomplishments make the community a magnet for talented people coming out of schools or working at other places.”⁹

Whether animating feature length movies or crunching numbers for an upcoming audit, employees of all sorts of companies are increasingly expecting this community and passion to be expressed in their workplace through personal care. As noted by the NIH, a workplace can be a dynamic expression of community “if employees show concern and respect for coworkers and if employers celebrate traditions, recognize achievement, and encourage creative thinking.”¹⁰

Nonprofits can be very effective platforms for the private sector to help bring community inside the walls of a company. Unlike branded efforts of the HR department that can feel contrived for younger workers, nonprofits are authentic brokers of community engagement.

2. Social good is an expression of culture

Twenty years ago, social good was perceived as an ‘off-time’ activity. While companies made charitable contributions and hosted workplace giving campaigns, it was largely up to individual employees to engage with nonprofits in their non-work hours. Today’s employees expect company alignment with their values - and they expect to see this commitment lived out in the community. Not content with values on the wall, many employees take great pride in their employer’s partnerships with the community and perceive this engagement as a direct expression of values.

In 2008, Accenture launched its long-running Mission Possible program with technology nonprofit Apparo. The program enables local nonprofits to apply for both funding and consulting hours from Accenture team members.

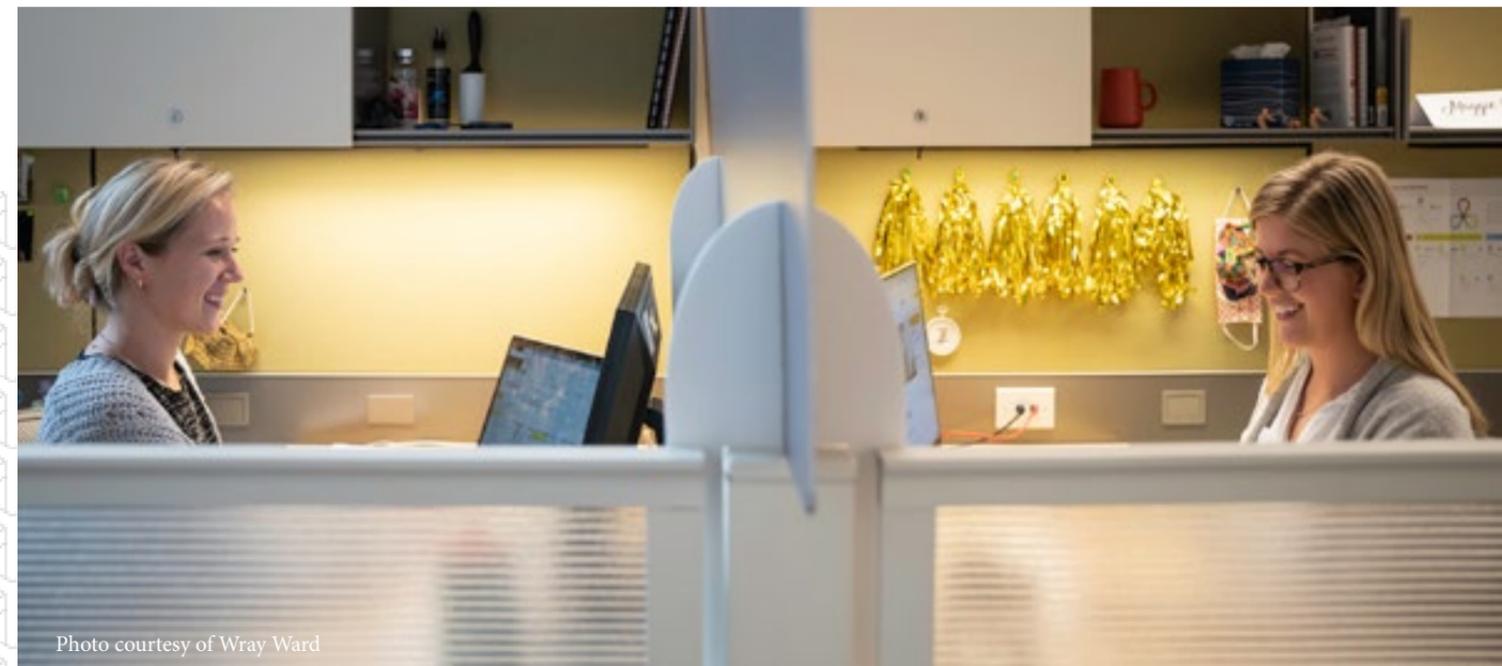


Photo courtesy of Wray Ward

The program found its footing when it responded to the Leading on Opportunity study's focus on economic mobility, with Mission Possible now supporting up to 15 organizations each year. According to Wes Slocum, Managing Director at Accenture, it has a strong return on investment.

"Accenture is proud of the work we're doing in the community, but the ability to partner with nonprofits is also a huge value-add to our own organization," said Slocum. "It engages so many employees and many of them cite this program as a reason they love working at Accenture."

Blending 'profit and purpose' during work hours can be a natural feature of partnerships with nonprofit organizations. Many of the most effective versions of this are creatively developed with the unique needs of the company factored in to the design.

3. Commitments to equity require action.

While diversity may be the first initial in DEI, the buzzy corporate initialism that is top of mind after a year of racial and social unrest, it is the middle initial of equity that is driving change in countless workplaces across Charlotte. As noted by Harvard Business Review, "the suite of diversity and inclusion tools and practices that went mainstream in the '90s are grossly insufficient for racial equity work."¹¹

This was proven altogether more true last year as companies scrambled to issue statements following the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. Chief Diversity Officers at larger companies and human resources and marketing professionals at smaller companies were summoned across the city (and the country) for emergency sessions to craft carefully-worded responses. Most spoke to standing in solidarity with the Black community against racial injustice and intolerance, with vows to deploy resources to tackle root causes. It was a watershed moment in corporate America that shook it to its very core and continues to impact companies more than a year later.

The questions remain - what comes next? Charlotte-based writer and Project Consultant Valaida Fullwood believes the proof will be in deeds and not just words: "While George Floyd's murder spurred many Charlotte corporations to respond, publicly, to racial injustice, it remains to be seen whether those responses mark 'a watershed,' in the truest sense.

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-Valaida Fullwood, Writer & Project Consultant

Companies came out of the shadows on matters of race with solidarity statements and grand-gesture pronouncements. The question looming is will these companies follow through, this year and beyond. A watershed will require companies remaining vocal and being instrumental in advancing Charlotte's movement for racial equity, justice and equality."

If diversity is focused on ensuring difference is represented and inclusion creates welcoming and respectful environments for all, equity is ensuring access and opportunity for all people, while also identifying and eliminating barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups.

In other words, equity ensures positive outcomes so that all that focus on diversity and inclusion is not just for show. In case it isn't readily apparent, equity efforts are exceptionally hard work that require significant commitments to honest dialogue and change management.

No one is going to pretend nonprofit organizations have all the answers when it comes to increasing equity in the workplace, but the company exploring a multi-faceted approach to tackling it would be well-served to explore what nonprofits have to offer.

Case Study: Sharing Family Values with Bragg Financial Advisors Q&A with CEO Benton Bragg

As an independent, fee-based, family-run investment advisory firm, Bragg Financial Advisors has been serving the Charlotte region for more than half-a-century. The company was started by family patriarch Frank Bragg and is now managed by five family members including Benton Bragg, President and CEO, who sat down with Next Stage to provide some insight on how social good shapes workplace culture at Bragg Financial Advisors.

NS: How would you describe how giving back to the community has been a part of the Bragg family values? What are the issues and causes that resonate most strongly for the family?

BB: Our involvement in the community does indeed originate in family values and our upbringing. From an early age my siblings and I witnessed our parents and grandparents engaging with the community through church or other nonprofit entities. We realized early on that we had opportunities and advantages not afforded to others. It's not their fault that they didn't have the support of community and connection that I did. A lot of the kids I went to school with didn't have a father, didn't have as much as a lot of other people, and you realize the inequality of opportunity. Trying to bridge that gap drives our charitable intent.

NS: How does this spirit for community show up in the company? I've heard it said by those who work at Bragg Financial Advisors that the culture is 'just different' when it comes to community engagement.

BB: We do recognize that culture is everything. It isn't profitability and strategy and the other stuff - it's your culture and the team that you have. If you treat people the way they want to be treated, they feel they are being treated fairly. That means bringing yourself into your work, building your own relationship with clients and telling them about yourself. We attract people who care about community, people who recognize that we should have pride in where we choose to live and work. Selfishly, we want to live in a vibrant community and we find that resonates with the people who choose to work here. We are a small company of just 25 employees amidst really large corporations. Our employees are making a conscious decision in choosing to work here.

NS: When you think of the social good causes, organizations or events that the company has engaged in over the past several years, what comes to mind?

BB: We choose to take a more focused instead of scattershot approach to our company philanthropy. Areas of focus include at-risk youth, financial literacy and the environment. We continue to support Right Moves for Youth, an organization that was co-founded by my father, as well as Catawba Lands Conservancy as we have a focus on land conservation for future generations. I could list a number of things our employees care about and Bragg Financial supports their passions, which is a less coordinated effort and decidedly bottom-up. But we do try to channel into two or three areas where we can concentrate our financial and human capital, to make a bigger impact.



Photos courtesy of Bragg Financial



NS: I know you spent the last eight years serving on the board at CPCC – how important is workforce development to economic development in our region? How should companies view the challenges of economic mobility as an opportunity?

BB: The market drives a lot of business decisions with companies doing what they need to do to survive. You've got to pay the bills to compete, to have good prices and survive to keep people employed. It can be hard to wear both hats, to be both altruistic and committed to business survival. Workforce development is one area where what's good for the community and what's good for business meet in the middle. We could be doing so much more to advance economic mobility through education, training and building that pipeline.



NS: What advice would you give other business owners regarding how social good can align as an expression of business success?

My grandfather had a saying that 'people do what they want to do with their time and their money.' We are all making choices. Life is short, and though we can't solve all of society's ills, we can get started and we can do more. We spend all day working with a group of people, our coworkers and employees. What can make where you work a fantastic and great place to be? The sort of place where people like the way they are treated, where people can be proud of what they are doing. For us, striving for that and achieving that is business success.

“ A lot of the kids I went to school with didn't have a father, didn't have as much as a lot of other people, and you realize the inequality of opportunity. Trying to bridge that gap drives our charitable intent.



Photo courtesy of Wray Ward

Chapter Four: Employee Engagement

With Charlotte's population explosion has come increased competition for talent, not only among the individual companies that are based here but also with other cities.

The Greater Charlotte region is known for having a migratory population of corporate executives who pass through on their way to a new city in the future. The 'golden triangle' of executive engagement is most typically between one's workplace, the children's schools, and a house of worship (if there is one), which can be found in any medium-sized city in America. Why stay in Charlotte when a job offer in another city promises a modest increase in pay?

A key to solving the 'musical chairs' of employee churn that results in short tenures is the same strategy that is likely to keep that talent in the Queen City – increased meaning in the workplace. Developing Charlotte as a city where people lay down roots rests on cultivating relationships that create a quality of life one does not want to risk leaving. The same is true inside individual companies, where human resource teams focus on competitive pay and benefits but tend to neglect one of the biggest reasons people leave – company culture.

Companies have an opportunity to harness this aspiration through engagement strategies. When employers bring the community into the workplace and encourage employees to engage outside of work, companies facilitate meaning and purpose for workers that yields positive outcomes.

Nonprofits are a natural partners for this work. Successful partnership requires companies to acknowledge it as a motivation for engagement in social good in the first place. It also requires honest discussion, with the corporate partner willing to share pain points and areas of need - discussions company leads are often less accustomed to having with nonprofit representatives. This will need to change if the promise of this new value proposition is to be fully realized.

“ When employers bring the community into the workplace and encourage employees to engage outside of work, companies facilitate meaning and purpose for workers that yields positive outcomes.



1. Let your workforce tell leadership what is important.

One of the biggest disruptions to corporate America is the disintegration of the top-down leadership culture that dominated the 20th century. In previous generations, the passions and interests of the C-Suite tended to set the standard rank-and-file employees were expected to match. In these cultures, workplace giving and days-of-service projects with goals established by management were the norm.

With the introduction of the Millennial generation to the workforce, this attitude began to change substantially. In a white paper titled Millennials at Work, PricewaterhouseCoopers outlined: “Millennials tend to be uncomfortable with rigid corporate structures and turned off by information silos... Millennials want a management style and corporate culture that is markedly different from anything that has gone before.” It is a trend that continues with Generation Z, which has also been called the ‘Founder Generation’ for its interest in entrepreneurship and challenges to the status quo.

In this climate of worker-driven culture building, companies have been forced to adopt bottom-up strategies that in turn tap into hidden strengths within the company. If an employee base is really just a microcosm of the larger community, then commonalities amongst colleagues in different departments are likely plentiful. Residents of similar parts of town, parents of elementary school students, and families impacted by similar medical emergencies are likely to have shared experiences that can serve as a jumping off point for relationship-building. However, if they work far apart from one another, that intersectionality may never be discovered.

“Our employees tell us what is important,” is the new approach in countless companies, with fewer ‘arms twists’ for employee contributions

and increased polling to determine interests. Partnerships with nonprofits can catalyze these overlapping interests to highlight this alignment amongst coworkers and channel engagement through shared impact. When invited to be a true partner to the company, nonprofits can co-create engagement strategies that harness this potential and turn it into action.

2. Support the individual passions of your employees.

While collective engagement and action is a natural goal for companies desiring tangible displays of workforce engagement, managers also know that it is important to support their employees in the exploration of their own interests.

Even leaders reluctant to jump in the deep end on formalizing a social responsibility program for their companies agree – encouraging employees to ‘live their values’ through the workplace is just smart business. As noted by Rich Carter, CEO of Carter P.C., engagement with social good bubbles up from individuals rather than from management.

“Our firm supports many causes but we don’t get involved because it looks good on the website and we don’t necessarily advertise it because we’re not trying to check that box,” Carter said. “But we tell our staff, if you have a passion, we will absolutely support you in that passion because we want our people to know we have their backs.”

Companies have demonstrated this commitment to supporting individual passions in a number of ways, from providing paid time off for volunteering to matching that volunteer time with financial investments. Increasingly, employees are looking for ways to bring themselves more authentically into the workplace and the next horizon for employers will be how to facilitate work-life balance that fosters individual expressions of identity.



3. Bring experiences inside the walls of the company.

Nonprofits can be ideal third-party platforms to help companies support the many individual passions of employees while maintaining a more focused approach to community involvement company-wide. Savvy nonprofit leaders have developed creative approaches encouraging constituents to serve as ambassadors of the cause which include ways to appropriately integrate advocacy and engagement in the workplace.

In the not-so-distant past, employee engagement in social good was primarily thought of as mobilized day-of-service volunteerism. On an annual or quarterly basis, companies would make a show of their alignment with social good through branded volunteer activities where employees wore matching t-shirts and engaged in a volunteer activity like cleaning a park or painting an office. As noted by one social responsibility executive interviewed, she spent much more time ensuring t-shirts were made and distributed for volunteer outings than she did ensuring that the volunteerism was moving the needle on employee engagement.

Expectations for employee engagement have changed substantially. Executives interviewed for this study described a new desire for authenticity and impact from community engagement strategies. Employees crave interaction with social good that broadens perspectives, deepens understanding, and above all moves the needle. Day-of-service projects may even have a negative effect, with next generation employees calling out the activity as “forced” or “transactional.”

This can be difficult for companies to achieve by themselves, with the very act of designing a program from within casting it as potentially inauthentic by the very employees the strategy is meant to positively impact. It requires weaving engagement throughout the company on a consistent basis and not as a one-time activity. It also requires creative, outside-the-box thinking that gets at creative expressions imbued with purpose and meaning.

Blair Primis, Senior VP of Marketing & Talent Management at OrthoCarolina calls this form of engagement “experiences,” and they are just as likely to take place inside the walls of the company as out in the community. Nonprofits can serve as high-quality vendors of these experiences through platforms co-designed with the company to address not only the imparting of knowledge about a particular cause, but to also encourage team and leadership development. “Nonprofits that come to me with one-size-fits-all engagement strategies are missing the boat entirely and honestly it makes me really disinterested in hearing the pitch,” said Primis. “But come to me with an openness to design a way for our two organizations to engage that encourages our team to get meaningfully involved, and I am always all ears for that sort of conversation.”



Photo courtesy of Crescent Communities

Case Study: A Culture of Purpose Beyond Profit at Sunlight Financial

Matt Potere has some secret sauce and he's willing to share it – “build intentional culture.”

Prior to becoming Sunlight Financial's CEO, Potere worked for years at Bank of America where he rose through the ranks to being responsible for its \$90 billion home equity portfolio. As he reflects on the workplace culture of his current company, he calls back to his first role out of college.

“I ‘grew up’ in MBNA where the culture was very strong and genuinely focused on having a positive impact on its People, Customers and the Community,” said Potere. “It wasn’t about levels or status but about living out a set of core values, and it was a way of leading I brought with me to Sunlight Financial.”

Sunlight Financial partners with solar companies and home improvement contractors to secure financing for solar systems, with homeowner-friendly loans and a simple process. As such, you might expect the company to focus its social good budget on primarily environmental causes.

“Sure, we support green and conservation-focused efforts,” said Potere. “But our team has varied interests that go beyond our work in this sector and it is important that we support them from the ground up.”

The engine for this is the Culture Club, an employee-driven group that focuses on building an intentional culture for the company. Their efforts include many varied activities but at the heart of the Culture Club’s mission is an opportunity to connect with social good. They are empowered to determine the nonprofit, the funding allocation and how they can get employees involved.

This includes an every-other-month speaker series to increase visibility of community causes across the 200-employee team.

“These are not my ‘pet projects,’ and if they were, it would have nowhere near the impact on our team,” said Potere. “Our Culture Club looks for real, passionate grassroots engagement that matches with our values.”

As an example, Potere mentions a recent engagement with a nonprofit called Together We Rise that is dedicated to transforming the foster care system. Following a get-to-know-you period and a financial commitment, the nonprofit’s team lead came to share a personal story about her own experience as a foster child and the important work the company’s commitment of funding and volunteer engagement was supporting. It was a powerful moment for employees, creating an emotional attachment that continues to resonate.

To Potere, the key is the development of an authentic culture where shared values are reinforced.

“There are plenty of folks engaging in social impact work because it is trendy, but the proof to me is in what we hear from our people,” said Potere. “Having ‘purpose beyond profit’ leads to teammates who tell me this is the best place they’ve ever worked, and that is frankly priceless.”

Photo courtesy of Sunlight Financial



Chapter Five: EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

Ask ten people to define the term ‘wellness’ and you are likely to get ten different answers. This was our experience when we asked participants in a recent edition of What’s Next? – our twice-monthly business roundtable – to take their shot at a definition. Our favorite was offered by one participant who shared “[w]ellness to me means taking time to take care of myself, physically and mentally so that I can show up as my best self at work.” This is pretty close to the definition we are using in this report as it relates to wellbeing in the workplace.

The professionals at Willis Towers Watson define employee wellness through the lenses of physical, emotional, social and financial. Since this study is exploring the intersectionality between companies and nonprofit organizations, we have woven financial and social wellbeing throughout the rest of this report as it shows up through a variety of related topics. This section examines physical and emotional wellness, which have perhaps never had a more relevant frame than in 2021 following more than a year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout our research, leaders who sat for interviews with us spoke sincerely and emphatically about the importance of their employees and ensuring their wellbeing during the pandemic. The majority of those interviewed have still not returned to the office more than a year after the start of the health crisis and that required adjusting to new protocols and ways of working.

Caring about employees meant not wanting to put them in harm’s way (physical wellbeing) while also ensuring flexibility as families adjusted to working from home (emotional wellbeing).

The business case for this is clear – employees who are physically unwell are less productive and cost the company through the rising cost of health coverage. Employees who are emotionally unwell are less likely to adapt to change, are less productive and may be disruptive to others on their teams. One recent study by The Standard noted that 65% of employees have lost 10+ hours of productivity in a week due to mental health impacts, an almost 10% increase from the pre-pandemic baseline.¹³ A whole new industry has risen to provide third-party services to benchmark employee wellbeing and engage in efforts to maintain a high-performing workforce.

Through our local research, we have found that partnerships with nonprofits may have once been an under-utilized strategy in efforts to inspire employee wellbeing, but are now front and center in the wake of COVID-19. The line has blurred like never before between the plight of ‘underserved populations’ and the disruption to the personal lives of employees at all levels inside area companies. People are hurting physically and emotionally and this “moment of empathy,” as one interviewee called it, is an opportunity to radically reframe community health.



1. Embrace social good as a salve for stress and to promote emotional wellbeing.

As noted by Deloitte in the company's recent whitepaper *Rebooting the Workforce Experience*, "The pandemic fueled anxiety globally as more and more employees feared pay cuts and salary reductions... Sprinkler, an American software development company, hired a mindfulness instructor they called a 'Happier Coach,' who administered 'Mindful Moment' sessions three times a day for 15 minutes during the pandemic." Such efforts to manage the stress brought about by the pandemic on our work lives showed up in a range of companies interviewed for this study.

In some of those companies, these meditative moments were also combined with efforts to focus on those with an ever more difficult situation and get action-oriented. At Sunlight Financial, CEO Matt Potere described efforts by employees to channel funds to buy thousands of meals for frontline workers during the early days of the health crisis. When people felt most powerless and without recourse as a pandemic gripped the globe, focusing attention on helping those in a less fortunate situation had an effect of lifting spirits. It is a reminder to be thankful for one's own situation, no matter how challenging, that works even outside of a public health crisis.

Nonprofits can be dynamic partners to companies in this way, creating employee engagement efforts that promote emotional wellbeing through learning, storytelling and even catharsis. Erin Santos, Founder and Executive Director at The Isabella Santos Foundation, has seen the power of engagement with her cancer charity to quickly connect with a wellspring of emotions inside employees: "We might cover up that part of ourselves when we come in to work but it is still there, still present, still just under the surface, and helping people tap into that release can be a cathartic moment for both them and their teammates."

As companies contemplate strategies for bringing their employees back into the workplace, savvy HR executives are keeping engagement with nonprofits as a strategy in their toolkits.

2. Gamify healthy attitudes through causes to drive cost control.

They are so plentiful that it has become a bit of a running joke – every weekend in Charlotte some nonprofit has a charity walk, a 'fun run' or some other physical activity designed to raise awareness and funding for their cause. While these events are unlikely to go away any time soon, corporate interest in sponsoring them has waned. What was once a novel way to build a cause-oriented brand through event sponsorship has become a somewhat transactional activity based on day-of signage and logos on the backs of t-shirts.

Event partnerships that have withstood the test of time almost always include, as a significant component, the involvement of employees by sponsoring companies. These activities are less often driven by employee physical wellness strategies, but there is no reason why they should be left out. Improving one's physical fitness through the lens of a social cause can be a fun way to motivate people to take better care of themselves, which in turn can have a meaningful impact on the company's health care bottom-line.

While many of the strategies seem fairly straightforward with defined physical fitness goals, others are less obvious. For John Searby, Executive Director of Catawba Riverkeeper, getting people out on the Catawba River for kayak tours is a primary way he builds an appreciation for Charlotte's water source in corporate Green Teams.



"Catawba Riverkeeper offers kayaking experiences at three locations on Saturdays and Sundays from May through September and corporate Green Teams use it for learning and team-building," Searby said. "But make no mistake, it is a killer workout and you will be sore afterward."

Companies that already include incentives for wellness activities may want to consider gamifying engagement with nonprofits as both a physical and emotional wellbeing strategy.

3. Incorporate a community health lens on social good efforts.

The recent pandemic highlighted the health interrelationship between people who live and work in proximity to each in ways no one could have imagined. Wearing masks and social distancing, concepts that would have seemed so foreign in the months leading up to March 2020, became commonplace nearly overnight. Employees began to work from home where many found conditions spotty at best with a lack of privacy, weak Internet connection speeds and the need to supervise their childrens' virtual schooling serving as obstacles to productivity. While policies were set by public health experts trying to control the spread of a virus, employers and employees experienced the community health ramifications of those policies.

For advocates in the traditional community health space, which focuses on how socioeconomic hardship and cultural standards affect overall health, the pandemic has been a rare moment of increased understanding. According to Donald Jonas, Assistant Vice President Social Strategy & Impact at Atrium Health, it is an opportunity for reflection and action:

"The pandemic challenged Atrium Health to adapt rapidly to a new work environment. Some teammates and their extended families needed support for a range of issues, including essential needs like affordable housing and digital connectivity in their homes... This work informs our thinking about how to address similar challenges confronting individuals across our region. We know we can't solve these larger social problems alone. We have to work in partnership with other employers and we must identify and align with social good agencies and programs across the region to improve socioeconomic conditions for all."

Community health focuses as much on access to health care as it does on the social determinants of health, which are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. Factors like access to food, affordable housing and education, which are core social responsibility areas of focus for many area corporations, can be reframed through the lens of community health. This frame can help employees better understand why these factors are prioritized by their employer and ultimately how it can make for a healthier community for all (including their own teams).



Case Study: Exploring the Criticalness of Employee Wellness with Willis Towers Watson

If you are less familiar with the company Willis Towers Watson, let this be an introduction to how they assist organizations to build a culture of wellbeing. According to Max Kennedy, Client Management Leader for the Carolinas and Florida, wellbeing is a critical component to the future success of any organization.

“In today’s unique and dynamic business environment, organizations need to support their Associates’ wellbeing. According to our research, 89% of Associates are experiencing anxiety, 66% report they are distracted from work and 69% have financial concerns.” Kennedy said, “Successful wellbeing strategies are not isolated programs or initiatives, rather they are purpose-driven and woven into the fabric of organizational values and the Associate experience.

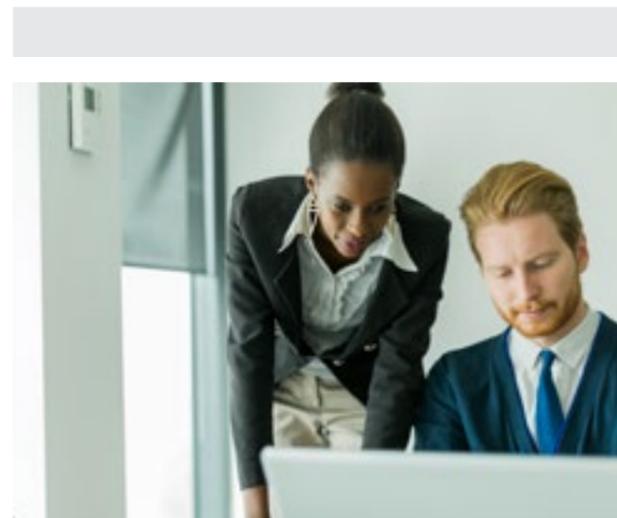
According to its website, Willis Towers Watson is a “a leading global advisory, broking and solutions company that helps clients around the world turn risk into a path for growth.” The company helps corporations manage risk, optimize benefits, and cultivate talent, allowing for a unique lens on the critical intersection between talent, assets and ideas. The company is a natural for inclusion in this study for how they are unpacking the intersection between the private sector and nonprofit organizations.

While Next Stage is defining wellness for this study through a lens of physical and emotional wellbeing, Willis Towers Watson’s Lauren Hoeck, a Senior Consulting Actuary, makes a strong case for a wider definition.

“If you look back 50 years ago, 90 percent of the assets in the S&P 500 were tangible assets and now 90 percent are intangible and employee wellbeing should be a top priority,” Hoeck said. “One in seven employees report issues with physical, financial, emotional and social wellbeing and it leads to damaging outcomes for both the company and the employee if it isn’t addressed.”

Karyn Tindall, Client Relationship Director at Willis Towers Watson agrees.

“Our research shows that almost 90 percent of employers feel their senior leadership sincerely cares about employee wellbeing, but only 50% of employees agree,” Tindall said. “The pandemic has created a spotlight on this issue, and bridging the gap is critical to achieving greater employee engagement and being a destination employer in the future.”



“ One in seven employees report issues with physical, financial, emotional and social wellbeing and it leads to damaging outcomes for both the company and the employee if it isn’t addressed.

—Lauren Hoeck, Senior Consulting Actuary



Determining how best to bridge that gap for clients is the work of Willis Towers Watson’s 45,000 employees serving more than 140 countries and markets. One truism that resonates no matter the market is straightforward: simply ask.

“Understanding what your employee population needs is an ongoing challenge and an opportunity,” Hoeck said. “And it requires frequent measurement to allow for segmentation to really get to the heart of what is happening and how to address it.”

Employee listening and sensing surveys are a critical tool in the toolkit for determining how best to increase employee wellbeing. Ten years ago, it may have been difficult to get some companies to even engage in an annual survey for fear of what might be heard – “what happens if we don’t know how to address what they tell us?” – but now annual surveys are too infrequent. “Developing a robust listening strategy with multiple touchpoints, segmenting results, amplifying diverse voices, and developing action plans and communicating them are critical to demonstrate leadership commitment to employees,” Tindall says.

Measurement is also critical to help support the business case. Willis Towers Watson Global Benefits Attitudes Research finds that those struggling with wellbeing miss 12 more days per year due to presenteeism and two times more likely to take time off due to unexpected reasons during the pandemic.

Eddie Gammill, PhD, RN, wellbeing expert and clinical strategist at Willis Towers Watson highlights that the

wellbeing challenge is critical to both employers and employees. “83% of employers indicate wellbeing is a priority over the next three years,” he states, “but just 41% of employers agree that their wellbeing program meets employee needs. Employers also have an increased focus in areas like behavioral health and complex care related to cancer and musculoskeletal. Meanwhile employees also have an increased interest in wellbeing and they report their top concerns as emotional wellbeing and social wellbeing/connectors.”

According to Hoeck and Tindall, engagement with nonprofit organizations may be a part of the solution.

Younger generation employees want to work for purpose-driven companies but that does not necessarily mean a path to social enterprise. Companies of all sizes and industries have an opportunity to translate values into purpose that resonates with employees. Partnering with nonprofits is one way for a company to address emotional and social wellbeing in ways that are authentic.

“Nonprofits often exemplify channeling purpose into action that drives engagement,” Tindall said. “As companies focus on leading with purpose, sustainability, and improving employee wellbeing, nonprofits have a great opportunity to help the private sector solve current challenges. This includes attracting and retaining diverse talent, promoting engagement, focusing on the crucial role of managers, continued skills development, and strengthening resiliency. As we found through our Dignity at Work research, when Purpose and Dignity at work are high, employees are 15x more likely to be engaged.”¹⁵



Chapter Six: Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

There is no topic in this study more fraught with difficulty and challenge than how businesses fit into efforts to create a more equitable society.

Some of this stems from a perception gap. Take for instance Accenture's recent white paper on the topic, which included a global survey of more than 30,000 professionals in 28 countries that found that diversity and inclusion was not a top strategic priority for the majority of corporate leaders. At the heart is a central misconception about their corporate cultures – more than two-thirds of leaders (68%) said they felt they create empowering environments where people feel a sense of belonging while just one third (36%) of employees agreed.¹⁶

It is worth noting the date on that study, which was published March 5, 2020. What a difference a few months would make.

The murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, captured on video for all the world to see, sparked a national movement for racial justice that had been simmering just under the surface for a long time. In Charlotte, the eruption of protests was a reminder of the civil unrest in the wake of the officer-involved shooting of Keith Lamont Scott in 2016. And like that time in Charlotte's recent history, the calls for racial justice reverberated through the streets and corporate halls alike.

The response by Charlotte largest corporations was swift. Most companies issued statements of standing in solidarity with Black and Brown people in the fight for equality. By June, multiple companies had made sizable financial commitments to address racial inequity.

But what comes next? How will companies do the really difficult work of examining how their policies and processes propagate inequity? And can nonprofits be partners in that work?

Here we must admit that there are few easy answers including the role nonprofits might play. In fact, many nonprofits are experiencing their own moments of reckoning as they unpack how white privilege in governance and philanthropy has shaped policies and programming.

Since the board leaders of those nonprofits are also often employees of area companies, it is fair to say the intersection between the private sector and nonprofits on the subject of racial and social justice is already in place.



TAKE ACTION

1. Find Your Advocacy Voice.

Make no mistake - to prioritize the creation of a more equitable company and society is to make a stand as an advocate. Unlike other areas of social good where one might be supportive despite not being directly a contributing participant, racial and social justice requires commitment. You either are or are not onboard. Making half-commitments is no better than staying silent, and may actually open your company up to risk should duplicity be discovered.

This 'all or nothing' stance has challenged some company leaders who use phrasing like 'staying out of politics' and 'respecting the opinions of everyone on the topic.' In effect, that attempt at a neutral position casts your company as much as declarative statement-making, and it is a fact of business now that passiveness is not really feasible. Charlotte-based writer and Project Consultant Valaida Fullwood notes:

"I would question whether so-called neutrality is even possible, particularly when faced with matters of consequence. Lessons from history – whether 1930s Germany, 1960s America or any pivotal time – show 'you can't be neutral on a moving train.' Historian Howard Zinn's classic quote asserts that periods of history, such as what we are experiencing now, are like moving trains. Corporations can choose to come on board, or they can choose to stay at the station. But, let's be clear, they are not neutral."

The complexity of change management means these efforts are going to take time and energy to make real. In the meantime, companies have discovered that investments in the nonprofit sector are an opportunity to put words into action.



2. Pay The Experts.

As most companies learned quickly last year, designing and implementing strategies to combat inequity in the workplace requires reinforcements. Luckily, Charlotte features a number of high-quality DEI consultants, thought leaders and nonprofits well positioned to help.

One expert nonprofit resource is Race Matters for Juvenile Justice, a collaborative leadership group working in Charlotte to reduce disproportionality and disparate outcomes for children and families of color through institutional organizing, education, and workforce development. The organization's Speaker's Bureau is set up to engage with companies and other institutions to prepare for structural transformation.

Another expert nonprofit resource is Community Building Initiative, which gives people and organizations the knowledge, skills, and courage to fight bias, remove barriers to opportunity and build a more equitable and just Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The organization's Equity Impact Circles (EICs) are the primary tool used to increase both the understanding and advancement of equity in the community. EICs are ideal for both intact groups like work teams and corporate affinity groups.



TAKE ACTION

3. Treat Equity as a Social Good Through-Line.

Companies that choose to walk the path of DEI find out quickly that there is no component of the business model that it doesn't inform. From employee hiring practices to sales strategy, management promotions to data-keeping policies, everything a company does should be screened through the question: "can this be more equitable?"

This is especially true for how companies engage nonprofit organizations. While the assumption may be that all nonprofits are inherently equity-focused, that is not altogether true. No one doubts the sincerity of those who tackle community challenges but the truth is that some nonprofits are more equitable than others, and exploring how that differentiates social good organizations from one another is key.

It is a central value proposition for Charis Blackmon, Executive Director of the West Side Community Land Trust, a nonprofit focused on creating permanently affordable housing in the West Charlotte community. The organization's tripartite board structure, along with other internalized practices, ensures residents have strong representation in decision-making and help to shape the organization's strategic direction.

"The value of equity is the cornerstone of our work, literally shaping and informing everything we do," said Blackmon. "For companies looking to invest in affordable housing, while also centering DEI practices, West Side CLT would be a compelling partner."



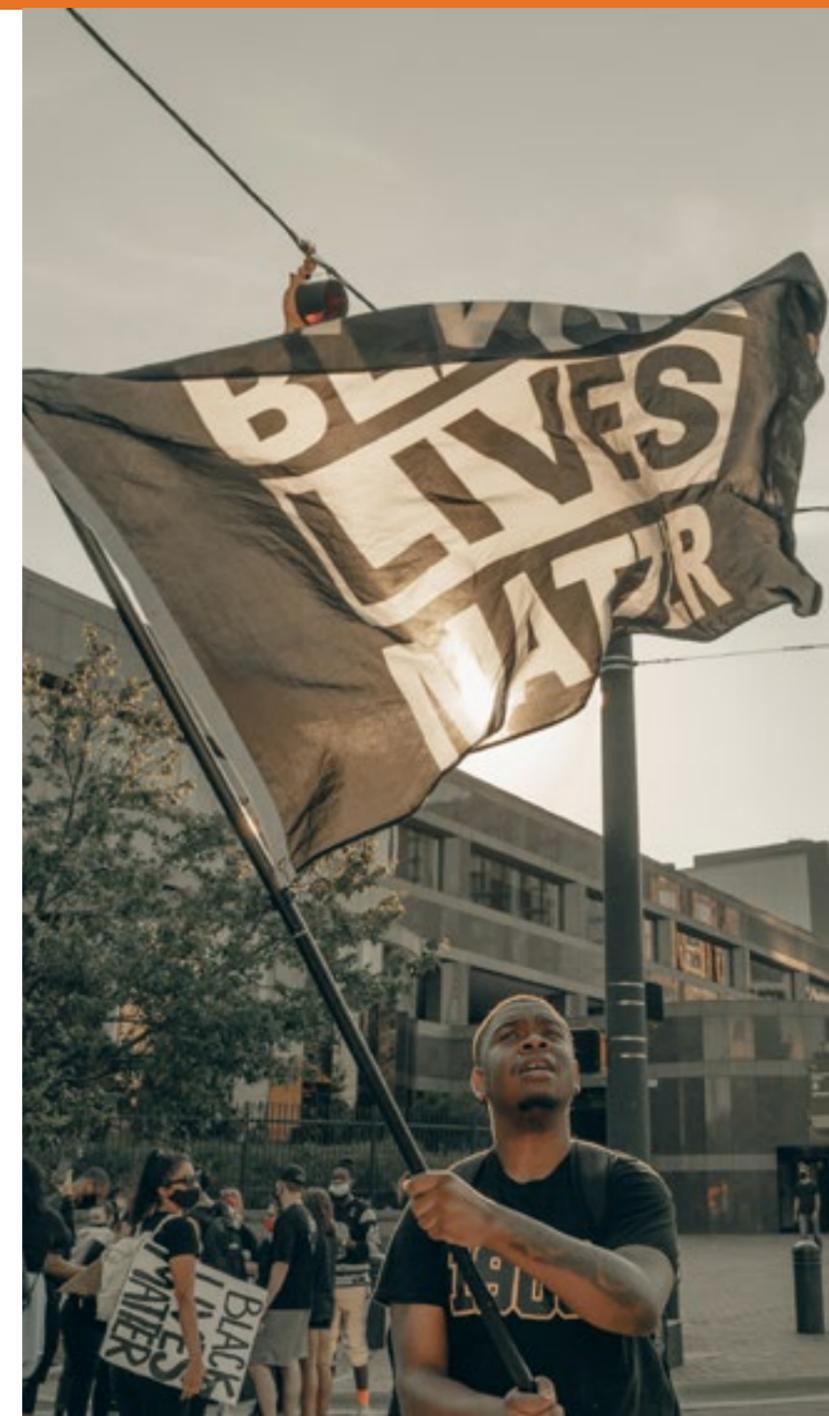
A Moment of Equity Reckoning in the Queen City

At the end of each chapter in this report, we have aimed to highlight a company that illuminates the findings from the study. These profiles form a framework of applied research, where concepts in theory are demonstrated in practice.

This chapter on diversity, equity and inclusion does not include a case study. And that isn't because we didn't look for one – we did – but effective practices are still a work-in-progress for many Charlotte-based companies.

As noted in this chapter, the focus on diversity and inclusion that informed the creation of employee resource groups in the past are no longer sufficient. The examination of equity requires a different set of tools and a new platform of engagement. That much we know. But what does that look like?

Diversity, equity and inclusion practices are a hot topic these days, in nonprofits and private sector organizations alike. The choices our organizations make today will have resounding effects for years to come - and it's up to all of us to ensure that these choices venture beyond well-worded statements into tangible, equitable change.



BUILD A NEXT GENERATION WORKFORCE



BUILD A NEXT GENERATION WORKFORCE CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Social good can strengthen the talent pipeline through development, education and training.

Talent Recruitment

1. Building a workplace culture focused on social good starts with committing to **values-driven** hiring. Today's top talent is equally likely to evaluate the company for its own values and community engagement.
2. While salary and benefits will remain a top priority during the hiring process, younger talent is very focused on **work-life balance**. Offering time away to engage with nonprofits is an old strategy with renewed purpose.
3. The talent shortage in many industries requires companies to aggressively compete for a small talent pool or consider **non-traditional hiring sources**. Nonprofits can be ideal partners for growing a new talent pipeline.

Case Study Attracting Talent Through Social Good at Wray Ward

Workforce Pipeline

1. The business needs of local employers are an opportunity to reach into community to create **new streams of talent**. Navigating local resources may be a challenge for HR teams, but nonprofits can partner on effective strategies.
2. Selecting a nonprofit partner for a workforce strategy is not unlike other types of strategic partnerships. Smart companies build relationships with their nonprofit partners to **ensure a strong fit**.
3. It takes time for workforce pipelines to mature. **Mentorship** and **apprenticeship programs** are not a quick fix, but persistence, patience and time bring big rewards.

Case Study Building an Equity-Informed Talent Pipeline at Torrent Consulting

Professional Development

1. Engaging in volunteerism with nonprofits is a strong way to **develop the skills** of a company's workforce, as leadership, problem-solving and team building are framed by community need.
2. If companies thought Millennials were disruptive, wait until they meet Gen Z. Often called the **'Founder Generation,'** these employees are competitive, fast-moving and natural risk-takers who see in emerging nonprofit leaders a kinship. This is a natural alignment to explore.
3. Younger workers are conscious of **representation** in ways that previous generations seldom considered. Engaging with social good is an opportunity to put their experiences into practice in service to community.

Case Study Launching Community-Focused Professional Development at Moore & Van Allen



BUILD A NEXT GENERATION WORKFORCE

“TALENT IS DISTRIBUTED EQUALLY, BUT OPPORTUNITY IS NOT. DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF WHAT YOU DO.

- Leila Janah

Just before the start of the pandemic, unfilled jobs in the United States outnumbered the unemployed by 1.4 million openings - the widest gap ever. JP Morgan identified this gap as one of the greatest threats to US economic growth, citing the vast missed opportunities for a range of business sectors.¹⁷ But with nearly 7 million jobs open, millions of people remained unemployed or in very low-wage jobs, creating a widening economic disparity gap in many communities across the country, including here in Charlotte.

This widening gap is fueled by a lack of skilled workers, as well as a lack of workers overall. High growth states like North Carolina are feeling a particular talent crunch. The Tar Heel State had one of the highest gaps in the country pre-pandemic, with 5.7% of jobs going unfilled.¹⁸ With greater numbers of people moving to the state, demand in areas such as healthcare and construction are outpacing the availability of program graduates.

Steelfab, a Charlotte-based steel fabrication company is seeing this phenomenon play out in real time. While local residents may not recognize the company's name, they see their work in the Charlotte skyline every single day. Steelfab is a leading national manufacturer of fabricated steel and a key player in the construction industry.

Their work can be seen at Bank of America Stadium, the NASCAR Hall of Fame, the Duke Energy tower, Hearst Tower and more. “With 11 plants across the country and 1,100 production workers, we are constantly hiring,” said Glenn Sherrill, CEO of SteelFab, Inc. “We were experiencing a 30% turnover rate every year and we needed to hire 300-500 people annually. It was a little disheartening in such a strong economy to still have such a great talent gap.”

Like other business functions, talent and human resources are undergoing seismic shifts - and the stakes are high. If this trend continues, economists expect a drastic impact to economic growth on a global scale, with one study estimating that the shortage could jeopardize \$2.5 trillion of economic output in the next decade.¹⁹ Companies are spending more money and time to fill more roles, while finding it more difficult to invest in and hang on to their existing top talent.

A number of trends point to major shifts for human resources and recruiters in a whole range of industries. Attracting, developing and retaining talent will be a critical goal for most companies and many are looking at innovative ways to educate and re-train talent to fill a widening field of needs.

The New Rules

1. Focus on the widening skills gap.

The skills gap is a hot topic for blue-, grey- and white-collar industries and many experts point to this gap as the reason there are so many unfilled positions. Thirty years ago, a high school graduate could get a job and make a wage that would support a family, through either college education or a stable, blue-collar career. Technology and industry changes mean that today's jobs often require college or vocational training, but rising educational costs are leaving many students behind.

Middle income jobs are particularly impacted by this phenomenon because education and public opinion have yet to catch up with a field that is rapidly changing due to technology and an aging workforce. The myth today is that the jobs are entirely disappearing due to automation, but that is not the whole story. While automation is taking the place of some jobs, it is also creating opportunity - but it changes what those jobs look like and in some cases requires different training. While robots and artificial intelligence are replacing humans on the assembly line, now there is a need for trained machinists, programmers and equipment operators.²⁰

The gap is similar in professional fields such as technology and engineering. Universities are not turning out enough graduates to fill roles in a highly competitive field, making competition for existing talent high, with many businesses competing for the same pool of specialized developers, creating a gap that is only predicted to widen in the near future.

2. Consider the aging workforce.

In many industries the impact of the talent squeeze is compounded by an aging workforce. As Baby Boomers retire, particularly from blue-collar fields, it is creating a talent vacuum and leaving more jobs unfilled - a trend that is expected to continue through at least 2030.²¹

With the youngest Boomers nearing 60, the pace of retirement is expected to drastically increase in the next decade and the impacts will be wide-reaching. The exiting of Boomers from the workforce will open opportunities for promotion for some workers - but in other industries will create a gap that will be difficult to fill. This is particularly true in manufacturing and other blue- and grey-collar fields, where the myth of the 'hollowed out' workforce has created a gap in the number of graduates pursuing these opportunities.

3. Evolve avenues for education.

Educational and re-training opportunities are still evolving to meet the demands of a changing workforce. For older generations, the choices were simpler - enroll at a university, pursue vocational training or obtain a stable job. While those choices certainly had their own challenges, the pathways were fairly clear for most students. Today, the options are less clear and often more expensive for students.

“Companies are spending more money and time to fill more roles, while finding it more difficult to invest in and hang on to their existing top talent.”



Photo courtesy of Torrent Consulting

The primary objective of many schools is still to get students to college, despite the increasing gap in middle income careers such as construction, manufacturing and mechanics. In 2020, vocational school enrollment was down across industries. According to the US Department of Education, the number of students seeking trade degrees has fallen from 1 in 4 in 1990 to 1 in 5 today.²²

Many students assume the myth about disappearing blue- and grey-collar jobs is true, despite the growing number of vocational fields and jobs.

At the same time, educational costs are growing, making them unattainable for many lower and middle income US families. Nonprofits such as Year Up point to what they call the Opportunity Divide - the disconnect between education and economic opportunity for many students with risk factors such as financial hardship and lack of meaningful training.

National college enrollment has fallen more than 11% since 2011, a phenomenon that intensified in 2020 due to the pandemic.²³ This news isn't just potentially devastating for businesses. As the gap widens, opportunities for students and workers already on the margins become more difficult to attain - despite access to opportunity being one of the most critical elements in social and economic mobility.

The good news - many businesses, nonprofits and educational institutions are investing in a range of new educational opportunities, including internships, apprenticeships, re-training programs and more.



As the gap widens, opportunities for students and workers already on the margins become more difficult to attain - despite access to opportunity being one of the most critical elements in social and economic mobility.



Photo courtesy of SteelFab



Photo courtesy of Wray Ward

Chapter Seven: Talent Recruitment

Recruitment is currently highly competitive for most companies, creating challenges that impact both capacity and expenses. According to Glassdoor, it costs companies an average of \$4,000 and 52 days to recruit a new employee - more if the role is in a specialized field.²²

If building a culture based on values drives employee retention, as noted earlier, then nonprofits can also be a partner in sourcing talent when those gaps in your workforce do occur. In this way, social good should really have a strong connection to the human resources department of the company that goes well beyond the coordination of volunteerism.

External brand and alignment with values is attractive to many Millennial and Gen Z employees and many have demonstrated a clear preference to work for companies that align with their values. As previously noted, younger employees are savvy about the ways companies talk about their values and want their companies to live this out in every aspect of company life. Nonprofit partnerships can serve as an authentic bridge-builder between companies and their values, enabling employees to engage with those values in tangible ways.

\$4,000

According to Glassdoor, it costs companies an average of \$4,000 and 52 days to recruit a new employee - more if the role is in a specialized field.²²



TAKE ACTION

1. Commit to values-driven hiring.

Candidates are closely watching the way companies talk about their values and it plays a major factor in where many decide to work. Job hunting is no longer merely about who can offer the highest salary and best benefits package. While compensation does still matter (of course), potential hires want to ensure they are investing their skills and energy into a company that does what it says it will do in the community.

“We believe that a person’s core values are equally important to their professional skills,” said Daniel McCollum, CEO of Torrent Consulting. “Once we screen candidates, our interview process consists of two separate interviews - one for job-specific skills and the other to determine if they fit with our company culture and values.”

For Torrent Consulting and other companies, this values-driven approach has produced higher quality, more aligned candidates. “More than one candidate we have hired told me that they declined an offer with a higher salary because they were attracted by our values-centered culture and company purpose - it definitely makes us more competitive in the technology talent landscape,” said McCollum.

Jennifer Appleby is the President, Chief Creative Officer and owner of local brand and marketing agency Wray Ward. She agrees that values are a key factor in attracting top talent. “The very first question we currently get from many candidates is about Wray Ward’s company values and how we engage with the community. If a company doesn’t know how to answer that question, they are at a huge disadvantage in a really competitive talent market.”

2. Promote social good as a feature.

In Next Stage’s survey of members of the next generation workforce, the top three factors influencing satisfaction with one’s current workplace were work-life balance, a positive workplace culture and strong values that show up in how the company conducts business. These three factors far outpaced other considerations like access to professional development opportunities, volunteer opportunities and wellness programming.

It is clear that a value-aligned workplace is a top goal for talent – so why wouldn’t a recruiter promote that if it is an authentic feature of a company? The competition for talent was fierce in the months leading up to the pandemic and based on feedback from the individuals Next Stage interviewed, a tight labor market is expected to return before too long. Smart leaders inside many companies are realizing that alignment with social good is a potential secret weapon in the “war for talent.” While it will never dress up the lack of an authentic approach to social cause engagement, companies have the potential to make intentionality in this space a major competitive advantage in talent acquisition.

Nonprofit organizations are an obvious partner for this effort. Not unlike the focus on cause marketing, here the intended audience is comprised of potential members of your workforce who explore your website, check out your social media and talk with their peer group about the perks of working for your company. Making sure ‘they care about community’ is a brand promise that should urge you to consider how engagement with social good shows up.

“ The top three factors influencing satisfaction with one’s current workplace were work-life balance, a positive workplace culture and strong values that show up in how the company conducts business.



TAKE ACTION

3. Consider your sources.

An ever-shrinking talent pool in many industries leaves companies with two options. Become more competitive to a small group of potential hires - or consider new, non-traditional hiring sources. The first option is expensive and will become more challenging over time as colleges and trade programs graduate fewer candidates than the market needs.

The second option challenges companies and communities to consider new channels for growth. This need for growth aligns perfectly with a growing number of nonprofit programs that seek to pair nontraditional candidates with industries whose growth is outpacing their talent pool. Local organizations such as Goodwill, Road2Hire, City Startup Labs and Year Up support a range of nontraditional candidates, from returning citizens to students who lack the resources to pay for college.

Connecting with a nonprofit that understands both company needs and needed training for candidates is a recipe for huge impact on both the community and a company’s bottom line. As outlined in the upcoming chapter on economic development, this is also an opportunity to source nontraditional candidates toward solving economic and social mobility in the Queen City.



Case Study: Attracting Talent Through Social Good at Wray Ward

Wray Ward's President Jennifer Appleby has a spring to her step. Giving a tour of the firm's beautiful new headquarters building on Thrift Road, she points out all the spaces where she envisions nonprofits collaborating in the future including a stadium-style raised seating area, meeting room spaces, a 1,600 sq. ft. rooftop deck, and a 3,000 sq. ft. studio that would be dynamite for fundraising events.

"Inviting community organizations into our space just makes complete sense when you understand how committed Wray Ward has been to social responsibility over the years," Appleby notes. "It's woven into our DNA in a very authentic way."

A commitment to social good led Appleby to champion the launch of a service-grant program at Wray Ward called EmpoWVer to support area nonprofits in the company's focus areas of creativity, shelter and social advancement. Applicant organizations put forward branding and marketing projects where they need help and Wray Ward selects three organizations annually to receive full-service support where they are "treated just like we treat our paying clients."

"Social good is incredibly important to our team," said Appleby. "Our commitment to working with nonprofit organizations through EmpoWVer is also proving to be a differentiator for recruiting for our FORM internship."

FORM is a paid, 8-week, full-time summer internship at Wray Ward where participants build their portfolios by working on real projects. With so much competition for young marketing talent, FORM has been an important recruiting platform for the company to source strong project managers, copywriters and graphic designers.

"We didn't launch EmpoWVer with a stated goal of talent recruitment," Appleby notes, "but I am delighted to see so many next generation do-gooders gravitate to this important community work."

While the rows of desks and intentional work spaces are just starting to fill up as Appleby continues the tour of the new facility, it is not difficult to imagine the energy that will be activated once employees return to the workplace. The company's alignment of strong workplace culture, hands-on demonstration of company values and pipeline of 20-something creatives makes for a winning combination.

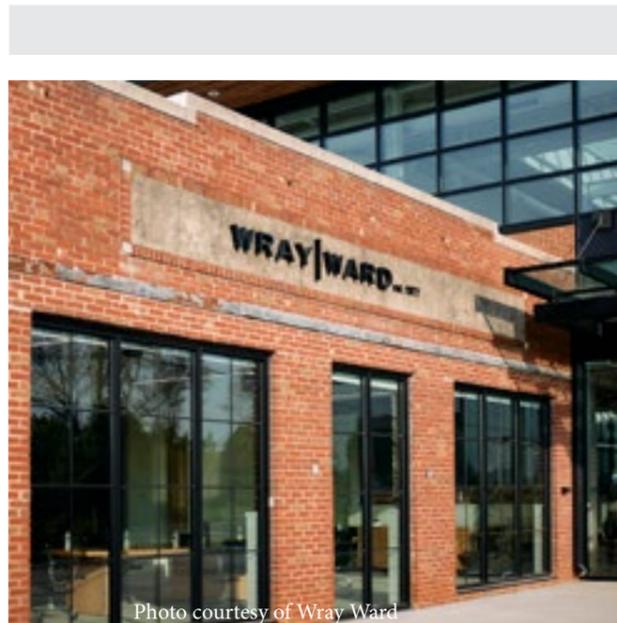


Photo courtesy of Wray Ward

“Social good is incredibly important to our team,” said Appleby. “Our commitment to working with nonprofit organizations through EmpoWVer is also proving to be a differentiator for recruiting for our FORM internship.”

Photo courtesy of SteelFab

Photo courtesy of Wray Ward

Chapter Eight: Workforce Pipeline

With greater demand for talent and greater interest in hiring nontraditional candidates, companies are taking interest in programs that source talent through apprenticeships, internships and retraining programs, such as coding bootcamps. Nonprofits have supported workforce development programs for years, viewing it as a critical piece of economic opportunity, but haven't always had the pipeline to effectively place candidates. There are few areas of nonprofit-corporate partnership that offer greater alignment and greater payoff than projects that help strengthen the workforce pipeline.

Building a strong talent pipeline is not an overnight endeavor, but the long-term rewards are substantial for companies and candidates alike.

Recent data from the NC Department of Commerce suggests that programs such as apprenticeships have a direct impact on laid-off workers, resulting in higher wages and higher employment rates for at least nine years.

For companies, nontraditional training programs will be critical to recruiting and training a workforce that is prepared to meet the demands of the coming years. The talent squeeze is only predicted to get tighter in both blue collar and white collar fields. Savvy companies will seek a broader range of hiring channels and invest in new kinds of training and support. Nonprofits have the expertise, connections and relationships to successfully identify promising candidates and offer training that will help workers succeed and businesses thrive.

More than
50%

In 2019, more than 50% of businesses reported hiring trouble, up from 40% in 2016. (NC Dept of Commerce)



TAKE ACTION

1. Consider your talent gaps - and your assets.

Before engaging with any organization, consider your own business needs. Where are the existing and future talent gaps? What kind of experience are you willing to consider? At the same time, consider what your business has to offer nonprofits and individuals looking for apprenticeships or workforce development experience. What kind of training can you offer? What support can you offer new or younger employees? When SteelFab started SteelFab University, they knew they had the structure to offer both solid training and mentorships, but they needed a steady pipeline of students interested in learning to weld, despite the long, sometimes difficult hours. “We know that not everyone is going to make it out of our program,” said Sherrill. “So we need to ensure that we have both the right pipeline and the right structure in place.”

Torrent’s experience was not without bumps along the way. “Early on, we tried to partner with a nonprofit, but their student needs just didn’t match up with the support that we were built to offer. They were an incredible organization doing great work, but we had to recognize that our own assets didn’t align in a way that would best support those students and lead to success for everyone.”

2. Find the right partner.

The number of nonprofits offering workforce development programs enables companies to partner with groups that best align with their own needs. Many of these programs are designed to connect nontraditional candidates to companies that can offer both training and career opportunities, but not every program will be the right fit for every organization. As Torrent noted above, companies need to consider their own needs and what they are positioned to offer.

Consider the types of candidates your company

is best positioned to support. Recent high school graduates will have very different needs than those of returning citizens, or of a laid-off professional beginning a second career. Nonprofits can serve as expert guides to the needs of each group and can help advise on how to build a program that meets specific skill needs.

Goodwill of the Southern Piedmont is training workers in construction technology. Community Matters Cafe focuses on restaurant and service industry training. Year Up supports students right out of high school who aim to land corporate jobs. Charlotte Area Fund is training people in truck driving, HVAC and more. The success of many workforce programs is heavily dependent on partner relationships, so make sure you have a strong and honest working relationship.

3. Be patient and stick with it.

The investment in workforce pipeline and nontraditional workers offers great benefit for businesses. Companies are able to train new workers with specific skills from day one and many workers that enter through apprenticeship programs are loyal to the company that trains them - one UK study showed that 73% of apprentices felt great loyalty to their company for the long term.²⁵ But these benefits come with more upfront challenges. “If we speak to 70 students, approximately five will show up to SteelFab on day one,” said Sherrill. “By day four, two of them will be gone because they don’t like the work. But the ones that stay are rockstars.”

Both Torrent Consulting and SteelFab invest hours of mentorship and training into their apprenticeship students. “I recommend going into a program like this with an open mind and understanding that there will be bumps along the way,” said McCollum. “There are definitely easier and faster ways to develop talent, but we believe that investing in our apprentices and our community is the right thing to do - and also that many of these students will stay with us for a long time and do high-level work.”

Case Study: Building an Equity-Informed Talent Pipeline at Torrent Consulting

Even prior to the pandemic, Torrent Consulting operated in a primarily virtual environment. Headquartered in Charlotte, Torrent is a platinum-certified Salesforce™ consulting partner with offices in five cities and two countries. On an average day in their Wesley Heights office you’ll find employees spread out across comfortable tables and conference rooms, every screen lit up with teammate and client faces from across the US and Guatemala.

Today, the Charlotte-based consulting team is configuring Salesforce with their Torrent Academy teammates in Guatemala. Torrent Academy is a two-year program that seeks to connect recent high school graduates with technology careers and higher level education.

When Torrent CEO Daniel McCollum launched the company, he intended to build a social enterprise. “It was important to me to show that you can have a thriving, profitable business that is also centered on purpose and making an impact in the world.” A veteran of both enterprise level consulting and local nonprofits, he is not shy about his commitment to both profit and impact. “When we started intentionally looking at Torrent’s impact, we realized very quickly that our social impact didn’t need to be separate from the rest of the business,” he said. “And then we realized that it could be built into our business model.”

Sourcing tech talent is a growing challenge across the industry. In the first half of 2019, only six of ten advertised openings were filled in the US.²⁶ Salesforce expects to create 4.2 million new jobs by the end of 2022, and while this creates plenty of opportunity for Torrent, it is consistently challenging to find new, qualified candidates. The company quickly realized that their greatest need aligned with community need, particularly in their Guatemala office. “Leila Janah said that talent is distributed equally, but opportunity is not, and we were seeing that play out firsthand” said McCollum. “We had been doing some volunteer work with nonprofits in both Charlotte and Antigua and realized that there were kids who had all the promise in the world, but lacked the resources to get the training needed for better paying digital jobs that would help move their families out of poverty.”



Photo courtesy of Torrent Consulting

“It was important to me to show that you can have a thriving, profitable business that is also centered on purpose and making an impact in the world.”

– Daniel McCollum, Torrent CEO



Photo Courtesy of Torrent Consulting

The company piloted Torrent Academy in 2018 by partnering with local nonprofits to hire three apprenticeship students to learn both English and Salesforce. Torrent employees were able to virtually mentor and teach the apprentices and most of the students were working on client teams within two years.

Evelyn Cumes was in the original class of Torrent apprentices and is now a full time Salesforce Analyst at the company. “Over the last three years at Torrent, I have not only had the opportunity to learn Salesforce, but the opportunity to improve my English and learn about business. I have been invested in as a whole person. Joining the Torrent family has enabled me to transform my life and my

hope for the future is to impact others in my community and to show what is possible,” said Cumes.

Torrent is reaping the benefits of a social impact program that engages its employees and builds a culture of social good that team members can engage every day. “There are definitely challenges and it’s not always the most straightforward route,” said McCollum. “But we’re building a team and a family - while also ensuring that our team has the talent to continue to grow and build a profitable business.”

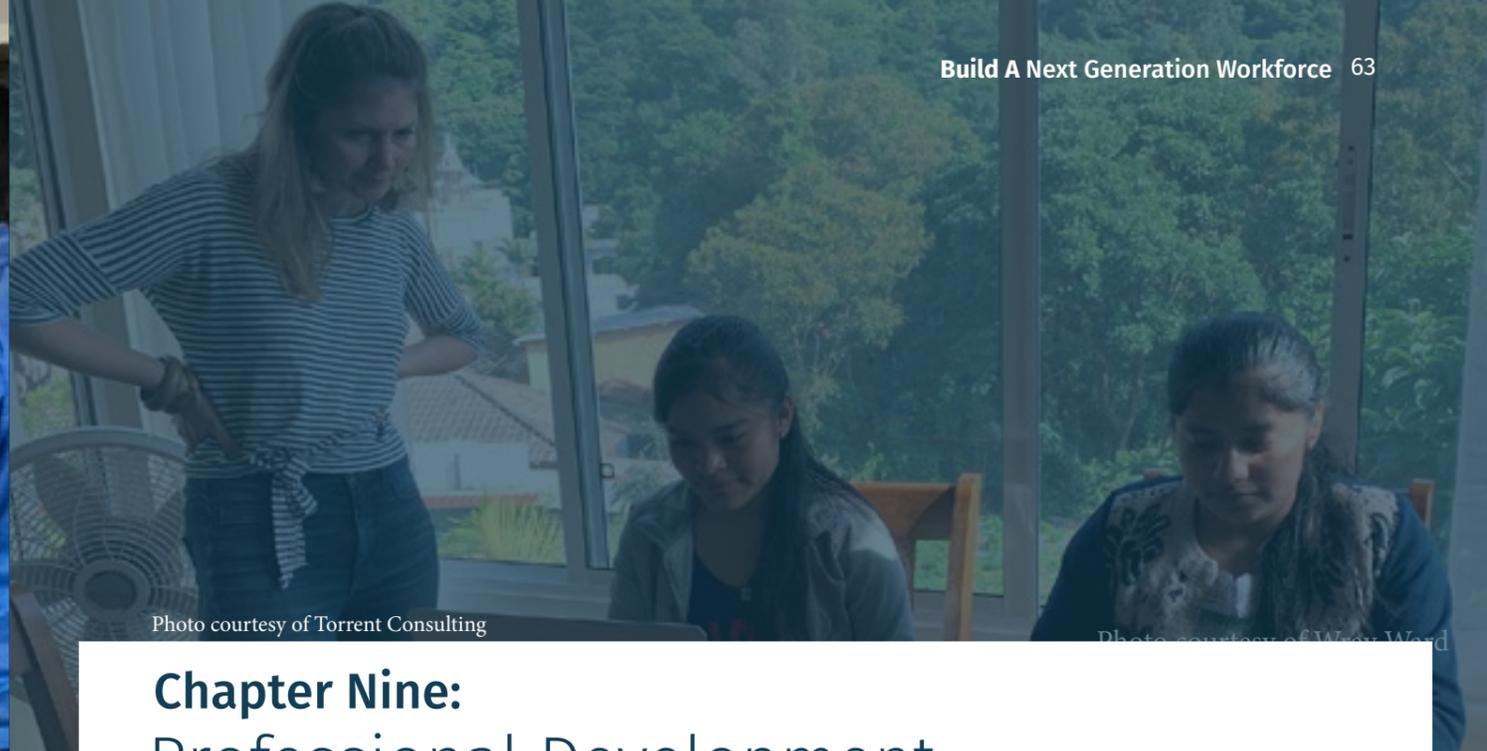


Photo courtesy of Torrent Consulting

Photo courtesy of West World

Chapter Nine: Professional Development

Next generation leaders desire roles where they can grow personally and professionally and a company’s ability to provide these opportunities for their employees is a key indicator of their ability to recruit and retain promising talent. This is a trend that spans generations, with one study noting that 70% of employees from three generations - Millennials, Gen X and Baby Boomers - stated that development and training opportunities were significantly influencing their decision to stay at a company. For Millennials, this number was even higher at 87%. Leadership and professional development can take many forms, including professional training, but multiple local business leaders cited nonprofit engagement as a key development opportunity for their own workforce.

Julie Knutson is a Senior Product Manager at Bank of America and a member of the board at Carolina Raptor Center. “Board service is like free, on-the-job training: I’m building my knowledge and experience in strategic planning, leadership, decision making, reading financial statements, and more.

Julie continues: And my company is reaping the benefits – I apply my new skills in the workplace every day and add value beyond just what I was hired to do.”

Professional development makes a natural pairing with nonprofit service, offering benefits to the company, the nonprofit, the young professional and the community. When companies are intentional about pairing strong culture with direct nonprofit engagement it creates a powerful combination, addressing a number of cultural issues that keep employees happy, loyal and learning.

Social good offers the opportunity to deploy sought-after skills in the community, while developing the next generation of C-Suite leaders and board members.



TAKE ACTION

1. Invest in skill-building.

For many employees, board and committee service at nonprofits enables them to flex their leadership muscle and learn skills that may not be part of their day-to-day work experience.

April Whitlock is the Director of Corporate Citizenship at LendingTree. She cites leadership development as one of the biggest corporate benefits of community engagement. “LendingTree wants its community engagement efforts to be driven by its employees because it gives it teeth and credibility,” explained Whitlock. “There are huge benefits from an HR perspective because it enables all of our employees to develop emerging leadership skills, challenges them to work through snags, empowers them to lead other groups of volunteers and lets them practice skills that may not be part of their everyday jobs.”

Nonprofit board service can have a reputation as a senior-level activity – something employees do once they have the benefit of years and experience to contribute but encouraging service at younger ages benefits everyone. Nonprofits are strengthened by a diversity of leadership across age, race and gender. Young professionals reap the benefits of a larger network and the expansion and honing of skills they may not get to practice in their day job. Companies gain name recognition and the goodwill that comes from engaging in nonprofits.

Most importantly, a business gains employees who are engaged in the community and building new skills that will make them even more valuable members of their organization.

2. Leverage the ‘founder mentality.’

Gen Z is often called the ‘Founder Generation’ because of their entrepreneurial mindset. Where Millennials are widely considered the ‘disruptive’ generation, Gen Z is poised to not only continue that disruption, but to drive it forward. A 2015 survey by

MTV was one of the first popular culture references to the Founder Generation. “We’re ‘the Founders’ because we are the ones transitioning to before, to what’s going to become after,” explained one Gen Z survey-taker.²⁷

This perspective has produced a generation of leaders that are often characterized as competitive, fast-moving and natural risk-takers. Paired with a strong concern for the world around them, these characteristics offer huge benefit to both nonprofits and businesses, if they are able to authentically engage and retain these young workers.

This entrepreneurial mindset makes younger employees critical to the talent pool, but companies are at risk of losing them if they can’t offer meaningful opportunities to engage, develop and advance. Board service is a perfect match for ambitious young leaders, enabling them to engage in issues that are important to them, while continuing to develop and hone their skills and network. In addition to talent retention, companies who can embed this powerful, founder-focused mindset directly into their workforce will be at a clear advantage as Gen Z workers age into leadership and management roles.

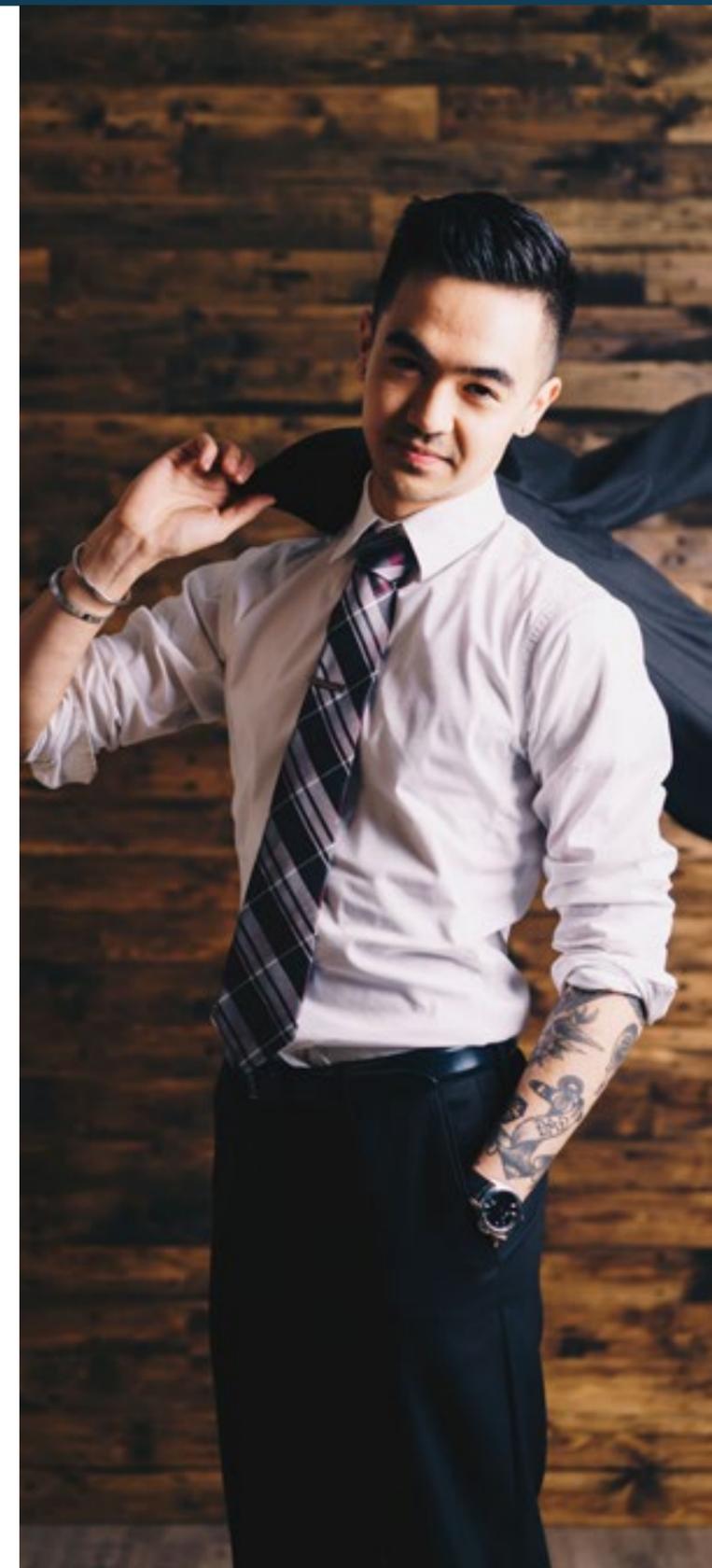


TAKE ACTION

3. Engage in community ambassadorship.

Younger workers are conscious of representation in ways that previous generations seldom considered. The Pew Research Center notes that the post-Millennial generation is on track to be the most racially diverse U.S. generation in history and many young workers want to see this representation both in their companies and jobs. Yet many of our community’s nonprofit boards and leadership roles are not representative of the community. In a 2018 survey conducted by The Nonprofit Times, 76.9% of nonprofit board members were white, less than 50% were female and more than 83% were over the age of forty – a vastly different representation of the communities many of these boards serve.

By encouraging and supporting the placement of younger employees on nonprofit boards, companies have the ability to help shift this perspective and provide a pool of board members that are diverse in age, gender and race. Morgan Hinton works at Premier Healthcare and is a member of the Care Ring board. “When I joined the Care Ring board, I was really excited about the alignment on a number of fronts. My day job is in healthcare data, but this has given me a broader perspective on community health and the way my work fits into the community.” Hinton also notes the challenges and benefits of adding her voice to an established board. “As the youngest board member, it was a little intimidating in the beginning, but I’m able to bring my perspective and voice as both a young Charlottean and someone who is directly connected to the Grier Heights neighborhood.”



Case Study: Community-Focused Professional Development at Moore & Van Allen

When attorneys Kimberly Zirkle and Ed O'Keefe were named as co-chairs of Moore & VanAllen's Public Service Committee, they saw an opportunity.

Founded in Charlotte in 1945, Moore & Van Allen has grown to more than 330 attorneys in more than 60 areas of focus, representing clients across the country and around the globe.

The firm has prioritized public service since its founding through pro bono and hands-on volunteer engagement. For the last 20 years, this commitment to social good has been stewarded by the firm's Public Service Committee – “an action-oriented group that seeks to identify, coordinate and facilitate public service and pro bono opportunities for our attorneys and staff.”

Moore & Van Allen has a legacy of prioritizing community engagement. The firm's approach is highly organized and comprehensive, the result of an investment of time and leadership.

“When Ed and I came into the roles of committee co-chairs, it was clear we needed to create greater connectivity across the firm to better coordinate efforts,” Zirkle said. “The committee was working in a bit of a silo and Ed and I saw an opportunity to knit it more cohesively through the firm.”

They began by connecting with the firm's Attorney Development Committee, with the promise of pro bono work creating opportunities for rising attorneys to get hands-on, practical legal experience. The firm offers opportunities for young attorneys to get experience through pro bono programs related to domestic violence, human trafficking, landlord-tenant disputes and providing wills and other necessary documents to low-income individuals, to name just a few.

Building experience while ‘doing good’ is a winning combination that Zirkle notes has had a significant impact on the firm. It has also served as a strong recruitment tool.

At Moore & Van Allen, attorneys are given an opportunity to engage in a variety of pro bono projects in practice areas where they may feel quite comfortable or, if they are interested, attorneys can choose

a pro bono project in an area where they may not get to practice often. Working with the firm's Recruiting Committee Zirkle and O'Keefe were able to reposition public service as a strategic aim.

“Changing up our approach to pro bono work meant thinking of its relationship to the areas of marketing, recruiting, training and client partnership,” Zirkle said. “Now it is woven into our workplace culture in a way that feels purposeful and like it has always been there – it's just who we are.”

In addition to integrating public service into other areas of the firm, Moore & Van Allen expanded its focus into non-traditional areas of pro bono legal services. The firm is partnering with other local attorneys to develop a new pro bono project that will provide transactional legal services to small businesses in North and South Carolina which are primarily owned by persons of color and other under-served entrepreneurs. The firm hopes the endeavor will empower entrepreneurs to grow and scale their businesses and is excited to join with other local attorneys to provide access to transactional legal counsel.



Photo Courtesy of Moore & Van Allen

DESIGN A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



DESIGN A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Social good can help companies develop sustainable business practices that keep economic growth, social mobility and environmental health front and center.

Economic Sustainability

1. Growing local talent starts well upstream of workforce development. Nonprofits focused on ensuring access to early care and education and **nurturing children** into adulthood are early partners in the local talent pipeline.
2. Companies can activate the local economy through the **supply chain**, a powerful ally in the effort to address economic mobility. Nonprofits can be important brokers as champions of local businesses, particularly when considering inclusive practices.
3. Though Charlotte is a national banking center, there are surprisingly few efforts focused on **entrepreneurship**. Nonprofits focused on local entrepreneurship can assist with implementing community-based strategies.

Case Study Charting Economic Access for Hispanic/Latino Entrepreneurs at Bank of America

Social Mobility

1. Companies involved in social impact strategies are recognizing the important role **community-based organizations** play in leveraging trust. This requires businesses to build new relationships to advance their social impact efforts.
2. A recurring gripe is the lack of **collaboration** between nonprofits. Encouraging formal partnerships is an opportunity for the corporate community that often provides financial support across multiple areas of focus.
3. No single financial commitment will change a systemic problem. But companies that adopt a posture of **multi-year investments** in nonprofits encourage increased risk-taking and pilots that lead to breakthroughs.

Case Study Bridging the Digital Divide with AvidXchange

Environmental Sustainability

1. Many companies point to their Green Teams – employee-led internal resource groups – when asked about environmental stewardship. Research suggests employees want more than **surface-level expressions** and nonprofits can offer tangible solutions.
2. Building a bottom-up culture starts with encouraging employees to ‘live their values’ at work. **Employee education and engagement strategies** are ways employers can work with nonprofits to design effective solutions that move beyond slogans.
3. **Smart growth** is a hot topic in the Queen City, as the city debates the Charlotte Future 2040 Comprehensive Plan. Employers, aided by nonprofits, can activate strategies that lead to a more livable community.

Case Study Building a Sustainable Development with Crescent Communities

Section Four:

DESIGN A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



GOODNESS IS THE ONLY INVESTMENT THAT NEVER FAILS.

– Henry David Thoreau

If you have made it this far into our report then you may be wondering when we will get to the traditional ‘charity topics’ that are most often the subject of corporate social responsibility. When we cast corporate investment in social good through the frame of philanthropy and ‘giving back,’ the causes we are most often to find include health and human services, education, environmentalism, economic development and the arts.

As we stated on the front end of this study, we believe that the concept of ‘corporate philanthropy’ is the right expression just with the absence of a stated business case that is always lurking just around the corner. One can argue that all of the topics listed above, when addressed competently and consistently by business leaders, lead to a community that is optimized for business success. A city that prioritizes access to education is more likely to have a competent workforce and a higher tax base. A community that champions the arts is more often a destination for talented professionals looking to put down roots.

While we may know these things intrinsically and macro data proves it to be true, it often takes seeing the big picture to understand how mitigating homelessness actually drives the company bottom-line. Hence the majority of this report’s focus on win-win-win strategies that seek to weave a new interrelationship between the private sector and nonprofits.

A Renewed Focus on Sustainability. In this final section, we will outline our findings from this study’s focus on these more traditional social good topics which we define collectively as sustainability. Unlike the more dated definition of the term which tends to make sustainability synonymous with environmentalism, our definition builds upon a focus of caring for one’s environment to also include social mobility and economic sustainability. We have found these three areas of focus to be a priority in the Charlotte region as it repairs from the one-two punch of a global pandemic and a renewed fight for racial and social justice.

From a far more bottom-line serving standpoint, sustainability is a strategic imperative for companies moving forward. For publicly-traded companies, shareholder demand for increased focus on sustainability is driving a sense of urgency in the C-Suite. Employee demand for tangible expressions of corporate values is undergirding talent retention and acquisition efforts. Customer expectation of an alignment with personal values is making social good a strategic must-have for corporate marketers. In this way, sustainability is having a rare moment in the corporate spotlight and challenging traditional methods of engaging with social good. Many of those interviewed referred to this as ESG, a trendy initialism that stands for environmental, social and governance. As note in a recent Franklin Templeton whitepaper: “[ESG] factors will play a major role in rebuilding the post-COVID world.”²⁸



From a far more bottom-line serving standpoint, sustainability is a strategic imperative for companies moving forward.

Since this is a study focused on the alignment between the private sector and nonprofits, we will not focus on the ways companies are most being called to work on sustainability/ESG, which is through their business operations. There is no question changing manufacturing processes to minimize negative impact on the natural world is a more meaningful expression of environmental sustainability than partnering on a lunch-and-learn series with a local nonprofit. And no one will argue that increasing the employee minimum wage does more for economic sustainability than a workforce nonprofit can possibly do through outreach programming. Reform to corporate processes and policies are coming as a result of shareholder, employee and customer demand, and these efforts will collectively make for sizable systemic change.

That said, for too many companies, investments made through corporate social responsibility efforts have been viewed less strategically in years past. Based on feedback from those interviews, this is no longer the case as social good has finally ascended to “a seat at the table.”

The New Rules

1. Climate change is real and pretending your company isn't a part of it is no longer acceptable.

It wasn't that long ago that nonprofits focused on environmental causes struggled with how to tackle the topic of climate change. Whether through outright requests by corporate partners to avoid it as a topic or perceived sensitivity by nonprofit outreach professionals, the topic was typically avoided as a potential ‘political trigger’ that was antithetical to constituency building.

That is no longer the case. According to EarthShare in their recent whitepaper *The New Business Imperative*: “Fortune 1000 employees value corporate volunteer opportunities to support the environment but have two new demands. First, roughly half want their specific job responsibilities to promote environmental protection or other societal cause, a practice called ‘job purposing.’



Only 26% report that their jobs reflect the environmental commitments of their employers. Second, more than half expect their employer to take a stand in defense of the environment, yet only 36% say their employer does so.”

While there may not have been a specific watershed moment, climate change is now more commonly found on corporate websites and woven into remarks by company spokespeople. But as noted in EarthShare's research, employees want action and not just talk.

In Charlotte, the built environment and transportation have been front and center of late with the City of Charlotte's work on the 2030 Comprehensive Plan and the Charlotte MOVES Task Force respectively. In both cases, the cause of climate change is framed through a local lens that brings home how decisions made now and into the future have impact on the global experience.

2. Economic mobility remains the biggest issue facing the Queen City.

It has become so often repeated that it may have lost some of its power – Charlotte ranked dead last in economic mobility, 50th out of 50 of America's largest cities according to a Harvard University/UC Berkeley study in 2014. Seven years later, despite the well-meaning focus of area corporate and private philanthropy, it is difficult to understand how (if at all) Charlotte has moved the needle. And now, following a year of the pandemic that saw a growing tent city form just outside the entry-point to uptown, it is hard to imagine that much has changed.

Economic mobility is rightly described as the intersection point of most of the social ills facing Charlotte. Generational poverty is the root cause of food and housing insecurity, the central factor in poor health outcomes, and the leading factor working against public education efforts. It will take the combined efforts of the entire community to prioritize it and move the dial.

Critically, this is an issue area companies have a tremendous capacity to impact. Beyond modest social good allocations, businesses have considerable spend in their supply chains to prioritize local vendors, stimulating the local economy with a particular focus on minority-owned businesses. Companies have an opportunity to fight the war on local talent with new recruits from underserved communities, prioritizing sourcing and workforce training strategies.

In a city that is the country's largest banking center and is welcoming new corporate headquarters on a regular basis, being last in economic mobility should be a bigger mark of shame than it has been to-date.

Based on our interviews, area corporations are getting serious about economic mobility. Significant headlines were made in 2020 by corporate commitments to support pandemic response and the fight for racial justice anchored by Bank of America's \$1 billion commitment to advance racial equality and economic opportunity (later increased to \$1.25 billion).

3. A lack of ‘trust capital’ is the missing ingredient

Beyond the commitment of funding, we found the corporate leaders we interviewed to be very open to new and creative approaches to solving such a major systemic issue. It is a posture we hope to see blossom in the months and years to come.

One of the key recommendations made by the Opportunity Task Force – the civic group that worked to create draft strategies for addressing Charlotte's economic mobility crisis – was to encourage the development of increased social capital. As defined by UNC Charlotte's Urban Institute in a 2019 article series, “[s]ocial capital most simply refers to the material resources or non-material benefits arising from our social relationships and networks.”³⁹ It was suggested by the Opportunity Task Force as a potential ‘secret sauce’ that could lead to increased economic opportunity.

As noted in the series, there is a potential ‘dark side’ to the building of social capital – principally that left to chance and without strong architecture, it can produce or perpetuate inequalities. Through our research, we have found that much of this is a systemic issue, with the ecosystem of social good poorly designed to produce highly-equitable versions of social capital.

In a parallel study, Next Stage partnered with Care Ring, a Charlotte-based nonprofit that focuses on empowering individuals with limited resources to establish and maintain good health, with funding from the Kate B. Reynold's Charitable Trust to examine factors impacting the social determinants of health in two key neighborhoods – Grier Heights and the University area. The findings clearly outlined the critical role community-based organizations (CBOs) play as ‘trust brokers’ within their neighborhoods. These CBOs were called upon to do heavy lifting throughout the pandemic to help bring resources ‘the last hundred yards’ to residents who were often too fearful and too distracted to be more proactive.

The rise of CBOs as systemic partners to change-making is an area of focus Next Stage is planning to make the centerpiece of its 2022 Social Good Report.



Chapter Ten: Economic Sustainability

It is difficult to discuss economic impact as a social good topic without acknowledging the impact COVID-19 has had on the Charlotte community. As one might expect, it was a dominant theme of interviews Next Stage conducted from Q4 2020 through Q2 2021. And yet, as devastating as the pandemic has been for the local economy, signs are pointing to a speedier recovery than might have originally been thought.

According to the UNC Charlotte Economic Forecast for the first quarter of 2021, North Carolina is on track to rebound from the pandemic quickly. The state lost 190,700 jobs in 2020, but North Carolina's economy is likely to add 200,000 jobs by the end of 2021. Having peaked at 12.9% in April 2020, the state's unemployment rate is 6.1% at the end of the first quarter with Mecklenburg County at 5.7%. Many of those interviewed suggested that the tight labor market that defined the Charlotte region just ahead of the onset of COVID-19 would likely return soon enough, and the data bears that out.³¹

While this is good news for the state and local tax base, it may be a hollow victory for a city that continues to struggle with economic mobility as its signature challenge. The pandemic was particularly difficult for residents in the lowest income bracket where disruption to the retail and hospitality industries led to layoffs that started a chain reaction. Area human service agencies have been working overtime to ensure the families most affected are stabilized, and the crisis has pulled the community together in new ways.

The nonprofit sector is positioned as a partner to area companies in a myriad of ways to advance shared goals of workforce development, economic mobility and increased prosperity.



TAKE ACTION

1. Grow our own talent.

It seems no matter where one looks, the business case for investing in education is strong. It was not that long ago that the tight labor market in the Charlotte region had employers contemplating creative ways to retain their people amidst increased competition. It has also led to an increased number of company-led workforce training programs as was covered earlier in this report. But for business leaders, the real work lies further upstream, particularly following a year of learning loss as the result of the pandemic.

"COVID-19 has had a significant and detrimental academic impact on the children we serve, with researchers warning of up to 7-14 months of educational loss," said Glenda Bernhardt, CEO of Freedom School Partners, an organization that tackles summer learning loss. "While we don't yet know the full extent of the damage caused by COVID-19, we do know that the learning loss experienced by our scholars and children like them could have generational impact to both individuals and to the workforce."

This should send a chill down the spine of company HR executives who look ahead to the next decade and see an increased need for talent across a number of fields including technology and manufacturing. According to LaToya Faustin, Executive Director of She Built This City, an organization that empowers women and girls in the construction and manufacturing trades, the time to act is now.

"By the year 2028, there will be nearly three million trade jobs available while the average age of an electrician is 55," said Faustin. "We have to reimagine what education looks like and we need corporate partners to help us fill in the gaps that our education systems are not set up to do."



2. Consider the local economy in the supply chain.

The buying power of a large corporation is among its largest assets in the fight to address economic mobility that dwarfs its annual spend on social good programs. Growing the local economy creates a ripple effect as small and mid-sized companies build workforce and create generational wealth.

Diversifying their supply chains is a big part of how many corporations are tackling the intersection between economic development and DEI goals. One organization working on this is ASPIRE Community Capital, a nonprofit organization that works with low- and moderate-income business owners to drive start-up success, growth and expansion. According to Manuel Campbell, it is important that business leaders take the long view on this work.

"Of course, in a city like Charlotte we want to help our business owners create relationships with area companies through their supply chains, but it takes time to build that capacity," said Campbell. "Corporate leaders should see this as a long-term investment in building an equitable local economy."



TAKE ACTION

3. Invest into entrepreneurship.

In a city that is often referred to as a business center, it may be surprising to find relatively few efforts focused on entrepreneurship.

“We have one of two ways to grow jobs in our region – attract companies to relocate here, which we are already doing on a prodigious level, and grow our own companies from the ground up,” said Dan Roselli, Founder and Managing Partner of CFV Ventures. “Unfortunately, the Queen City has a really weak track record of prioritizing entrepreneurship.”

Calling himself “the grain of sand in Charlotte’s oyster,” Roselli has been one of Charlotte’s most outspoken advocates for entrepreneurship as a counterbalance to the city’s moniker as a banking town. He launched Packard Place as one of Charlotte’s first and now oldest social enterprise hubs and challenged prevailing attitudes that “you can’t make money and do good at the same time.”

For nonprofits, particularly those that would use this report as a blueprint for engaging area companies, the same challenge can be found in how they will approach companies to build a win-win-win “vendor relationship.” According to Roselli, these entrepreneurial attempts by nonprofits should be embraced as a means to build increased sustainability.

“All nonprofits, regardless of size, should think of themselves as start-ups and founders, and should set about identifying new ways to earn revenue to drive their missions,” said Roselli. “And our largest corporations should spend into that construct as a means to increase resiliency in the social good sector.”



Case Study: Bank of America Charts Economic Access for Hispanic/Latino Entrepreneurs

Grace Nystrum and Bank of America are on a mission and driving change to impact the Hispanic-Latino community. As Senior Vice President, Strategic Marketing Executive for Charlotte, Grace is responsible for overseeing the company’s Hispanic-Latino segment strategy to deliver for clients, employees and the community to drive responsible growth in the local Charlotte market.

“We have an incredibly compelling story for us to tell,” Nystrum said. “And we need to amplify it for more people.” Over the last decade, the Hispanic-Latino population in the Charlotte region grew by 36%, more than twice as fast as the overall population. That has resulted in more than 8,000 businesses in the region alone. Nystrum and Bank of America believe that increasing access to resources for these hard-working entrepreneurs will have a sizable impact on them as business owners and society as a whole.

“There is no question that economic mobility is the essential ingredient for solving many of the challenges disadvantaged people in our community have, and creative strategies to get that done should be embraced as we plot a way forward,” Nystrum said.

As Board Chair of the Latin American Chamber of Commerce of Charlotte (LACCC), Nystrum has helped to lead a strategic repositioning of the Chamber to include a sharp focus on Hispanic-Latino entrepreneurship, an approach to partnership that links area corporations to expressions of economic development at the grassroots level, and a new CEO (Griselda Bailey) to spark a new business model. The results are compelling.

Bailey has been on the job since fall of 2020 and has already overseen the launch of several new strategies designed to advance the new strategic focus. The Chamber is working to realize an entrepreneurship pipeline supporting businesses in the forming and start-up phase, the professionalizing and building generational wealth phase, and the scaling phase. Entrepreneurs need access to education, training and mentorship, and the Chamber is positioned to help. In conceptualizing these services as a continuum of economic growth, the LACCC is positioning itself as a “growth champion” for its membership, encouraging right-sized approaches for various kinds of small businesses.

“We are listening to our corporate partners who are telling us that diversifying the supply chain and creating new vendor relationships are an essential part of their models moving forward,” Bailey said. “We see the Chamber as a bridge between companies that want to do business with our members and small businesses that want the same, a real win-win-win for everyone.”

This new strategy also includes a shop-local digital marketplace called La Plaza: Online, an online e-commerce platform specifically designed to promote and support locally owned, independent businesses. The platform will be managed by the LACCC, creating an opportunity for more people to get to know “the people behind the products and services.” La Plaza: Online will allow for increased human-centered storytelling, connecting the buyer to the seller in ways that bridge difference.

“We are aiming to future-proof minority-owned small businesses for success in the new marketplace of the 21st century,” Bailey said. “There is a demand for shopping local and supporting diverse entrepreneurs and we’re just creating the marketplace for fulfilling that pent-up demand.”



Chapter Eleven: Social Mobility

Look up the social responsibility focus for your favorite set of Charlotte-based companies and you are likely to find a broad cross-section of social causes. Many in the financial industry are focused on economic mobility, access to housing and financial literacy. Manufacturing and technology companies are most likely to support STEM programs (science, technology, engineering and math) geared toward growing capacity in future generations. Developers and utilities are likely to focus on environmentalism while retail companies tend to focus on more safety net issues like hunger and access to basic necessities. Some companies prioritize arts and culture while others have specific health charities they choose to support.

Looking through the alignment, it all makes sense logically – most companies choose causes that relate on some level to the work of the company, sometimes leaning in to potential areas of criticism or aligning with peer companies to support an initiative.

In truth, companies select their areas of focus as much through a purposeful decision-making process as a defensive posture – narrowing focus means being able to say no. And given how many requests for charitable support come their way, the first stop for filtering is most often the corporate social responsibility (CSR) lead staff member. As the only person set up inside the company to field requests, the CSR professional is in the unfortunate

position of declining requests more often than not as well-meaning nonprofits seek coffee meetings to kick the tires on financial investment.

“All of us in the corporate philanthropy space get cold calls,” said Natalie Brown, Director of Corporate Citizenship at Ally. “Because we’ve been so intentional about what we support and why, I don’t feel like we get as many cold calls as my peers.” Ally’s intentionality is apparent with its brand philosophy of “Do It Right” that is applied to everything the company does, including its corporate social responsibility. That is not always the case with other companies.

With this report, Next Stage aims to reframe how nonprofits and companies come together, and that includes elevating the budget for social good from a less strategically developed “slush fund” into an investment pool to create positive outcomes that, yes, also serve the best interests of the company itself. But for that to happen, the manner of investment of Charlotte companies in social causes will need to shift if we are ever to make inroads on the issues we care most about.

In other words, in a city ranked 50th out of 50 in economic mobility, the definition of crazy would be to continue doing things the way we’ve always done them and expect different outcomes.



TAKE ACTION

1. Bring grassroots organizations into the mix.

Charlotte is a new city in many ways including its nonprofit sector. Much of the infrastructure is less than 40 years old with many obvious exceptions including chapter-based and nationally-affiliated nonprofit organizations like the YMCA and Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont. The nonprofit infrastructure of Charlotte is composed of large, “agency” organizations that have built scale. Based on recent 990 data, more than 90% of financial resources go to the top roughly 200 nonprofits with budgets over \$1 million.

As we come back from the pandemic, there is no question our region needs our largest agency nonprofits like never before. These high-impact organizations have the ability to mobilize quickly and work with large numbers of people in need. For many companies, scale is an important factor when considering where to invest social good dollars, with organizations that have built large-scale capacity best positioned to receive investment.

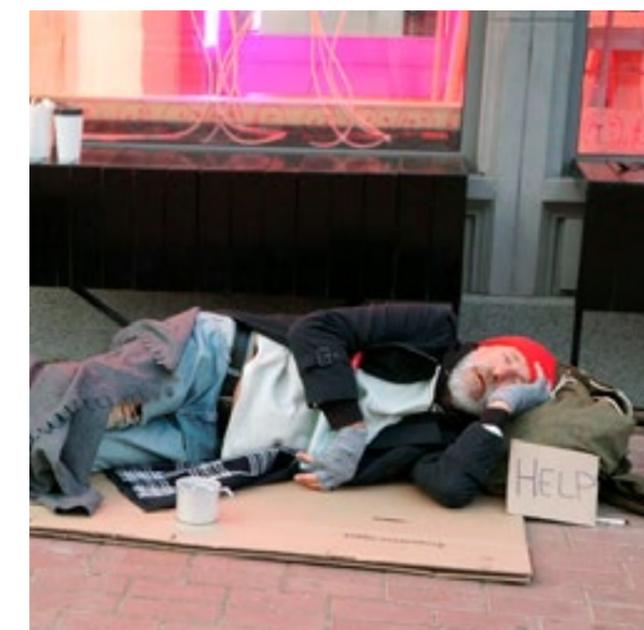
A central challenge for achieving positive gains in health and human services is trust – it has been the key finding of every major study conducted in Charlotte for decades. Here, scale works against efforts to build authentic, grassroots relationships that are forged within a community context. Trust-building takes time and is often best conducted by those proximate to the people served.

“Building trusted relationships that generate hope is at the heart of our organization,” said Adrienne Threath, Co-Founder of Hope Vibes, an organization that brings awareness, hope and solutions to the homeless epidemic in Charlotte. “Many of the people we serve hesitate to engage with available systemic supports. Hope Vibes is uniquely positioned to provide direct relief and serve as a bridge to resources because they know who we are and trust us.”

Companies can struggle with how best to invest in emerging and grassroots organizations that lack the sophisticated operational structures of their scaled-up peers. One strategy employed by area funders has been to utilize fiscal conduits like the Children and Family Service Center whose Shared Services platform can serve as an intermediary with early-growth organizations. Another concept that is starting to catch on is covered in our next point – encouraging collaboration between larger nonprofits and community-based organizations.

2. Foster collaboration through intentional efforts.

Ask enough people involved in social good in Charlotte to share their biggest frustrations and you will find a common theme – a lack of collaboration between nonprofit organizations. This “silo effect” is nothing new and is not necessarily a uniquely Charlotte attribute, but it remains a significant barrier to forward progress on social challenges that do not fit neatly in any one organization’s mission.





TAKE ACTION

The pandemic only illuminated this lack of muscle memory as overlapping needs around health, housing, food access and education saw preschools turn into food distribution sites and neighborhood associations adopt a triage mentality. A general lack of prior history working across sectors put the nonprofit community to the test, and while the outcomes were laudable, they weren't without significant challenges.

"We hear that we should 'stay in our lane' and remain true to our stated mission," said Banu Valladares, Executive Director for Charlotte Bilingual Preschool. "But the trust we've built with our families makes us an excellent partner for organizations interested in working with our constituency."

Encouraging greater collaboration and formal partnerships is an opportunity for the corporate community that is often providing financial support across multiple areas of focus. In the past, that has meant standing up new, third party organizations to carry forward collaborative goals stemming from community initiatives, but companies have the opportunity to use their own clout to forge cross-mission relationships. Since in many cases these are reflections of the company's own brand in-community, creating an expectation of collaboration by funded organizations may unlock multiple benefits.

3. Make multi-year commitments.

Each fall, nonprofit organizations across Charlotte scramble to respond to new requests for proposals from area companies while also stewarding current sponsors in hopes of being included in the annual budgets of corporations. With the sustainability of mission-serving programs and staff salaries in the balance, nonprofits are continually on a hamster wheel to maintain the infrastructure they already have, much less to generate new dollars for innovation.



TAKE ACTION

The proposal process has had purpose as company leaders do not want organizations to become overly reliant on their financial support. But the downside of that structure is an inefficiency of staff resources spent continually fundraising, lack of permanence for programming that could be defunded at any moment, and lack of ability to innovate and pilot concepts that allow for learning and growth.

A solution to this dilemma would be a commitment of multi-year support from companies to ensure organizations can build true staying power in the strategies and impact they aim to drive.

This is a sentiment strongly represented by the partnership between Accenture and Apparo, a nonprofit that connects other local nonprofits to technology expertise and resources that amplify their impact. The two organizations have partnered for more than a decade on Mission Possible, a collaboration that activates Accenture consulting support to help "improve economic mobility through technology innovation for area nonprofits."

"The long-lasting partnership between Apparo and Accenture is a testament to the commitment by both entities to make a lasting impact on the Charlotte area," said Kim Lanphear, CEO of Apparo. "The structure allows us to build supports around the central partnership and helps us plan from year to year, while providing internal ROI for Accenture in terms of visibility and broader team engagement."

While a decade is likely too long of a timeline for many companies to commit to on the front end, feedback through this study suggests corporate leaders are considering more multi-year commitments than ever before. This is a trend worth sustaining in the years to come.



Case Study: Bridging the Digital Divide with AvidXchange

When Rob Phocas took a job as the Director of Corporate Social Responsibility at AvidXchange in 2019, he knew he wanted to approach the role differently. “I wanted to seriously consider the role of our business within the community,” he recalls. “Funding is obviously really important, and our employees want to be engaged through volunteer hours, but my personal background is sustainability, and I wanted to make sure AvidXchange was doing something that connected to the bigger community picture.”

Phocas found his answer when he served as a board member of E2D, a local non-profit that aims to help close the digital divide for local students by refurbishing and reselling computers at a low cost to area them. Through E2D, he discovered the extent of the challenge at hand. “At least 14 percent of Mecklenburg County residents are without access to the internet or a computer at home,” Phocas said. “I learned that some local students are writing 12-page research papers on their cell phones which was shocking for me to find out, and I knew that this was an area that AvidXchange could make a tangible impact.”

AvidXchange launched Tech Rising in August 2020, a three-year effort aimed at closing Charlotte’s technology gap by working with local partners to ensure by 5,000 Title I students have refurbished laptops as well as access to the internet. Additionally, the Tech Rising program intends to work with 16,000 students in Title I middle schools to provide STEAM curriculum and 8,000 students in Title I high schools develop critical career skills.

Furthermore, through the work Phocas did with the Charlotte Digital Inclusion Alliance, a local partnership of nonprofits, government agencies and civic groups that target digital inclusion, he realized that companies were severely underrepresented in local efforts, so he knew that there was an opportunity to invite other large companies to join Tech Rising. To date, Tech Rising has partnerships with 24 organizations, including Bank of America, Microsoft, and Wells Fargo.

Pat Millen, Founder and Executive Director of E2D, notes that AvidXchange’s efforts are a critical piece of the puzzle. “Companies can access and engage other companies in ways that nonprofits can’t,” said Millen. “For example, early on we asked for donations of computers that companies were getting rid of and all of them told us no.

But when other companies got involved, those ‘no’s’ turned into ‘yes,’ giving us valuable resources.” “Companies have a responsibility to build a more sustainable community where everyone has access to opportunity and social mobility,” said Phocas. “It’s not only our job to fund and participate in community efforts - we have to hold ourselves and others accountable to the measurable, long term impact of our efforts.”



“ I learned that some local students are writing 12-page research papers on their cell phones which was shocking for me to find out, and I knew that this was an area that AvidXchange could make a tangible impact.

– Rob Phocas, Director of Corporate Social Responsibility, AvidXchange



Photo courtesy of Crescent Communities

Chapter Twelve: Environmental Sustainability

Charlotte is a booming city. Just try to find a new home in the current real estate market if you doubt that fact. As noted by WCNC in December 2020, Charlotte is experiencing positive net migration: “for every person who moved out of Charlotte, nearly 1.5 people moved in. Lower taxes and living costs, more space and a better quality of life are among the driving forces behind people’s relocations.”

As noted by Mayor Vi Lyle in an article from the Charlotte Business Journal last year³³:

Charlotte was the seventh-fastest-growing large metro, increasing by 15.9%, between 2010 and 2018. In 2010, Charlotte’s population was almost 739,000 people. By 2019, that number had increased to roughly 873,000 people. The bulk of that growth was the result of people moving to this city from other places such as New York, Atlanta and Columbia. Reasons for choosing Charlotte included cost of living, quality of life and job availability. Because of this, Charlotte jumped from being the 17th city to the 16th city in the United States by population, making us the fifth-fastest-growing city in the country.

While certainly a point of pride for government officials and area business leaders, such an influx of people to the region is having a negative impact as well.

Residential construction to keep pace with homebuyer demand is eliminating the habitat of local wildlife, car exhaust from 30+ minute commutes is impacting air quality, and constant vigilance is needed to ensure drinking water quality from the Catawba River.

Making the business case for increased focus on the environment while Charlotte grows at a rapid pace is how Charlotte area nonprofits are conditioned to operate, said John Searby, Executive Director of Catawba Riverkeeper Foundation.

“If corporate executives value their business and their employees not having to worry about water restrictions, contaminated drinking water, or loss of recreational resources then they should support the work of the Catawba Riverkeeper,” said Searby. “If they want to maintain some of the cheapest electricity in the country, they should support the work of the Catawba Riverkeeper.”

Nonprofits should be a go-to thought for companies interested in listening to employee, customer and shareholder demand for more focus on the environment and eco-accountability.



TAKE ACTION

1. Move beyond your Green Team.

Companies interested in learning how employees feel about company-sponsored volunteer activities should read EarthShare's excellent recent whitepaper:

It's not uncommon to see groups of employees clad in company t-shirts planting trees, cleaning up stream beds, or otherwise participating in corporate volunteer activities distinct from their day-to-day jobs. Today, however, only one-fifth (22%) of employees consider such traditional environmental opportunities to be very important.

This is not to say that employee volunteer programs are unpopular. Fifty-five percent of all surveyed employees note that their companies offer such opportunities, with even higher percentages among financial services (66%) and healthcare (60%) employees. Furthermore, the majority (57%) of employees who are aware of these opportunities chose to participate.

The findings here are clear. Corporate employee resource teams focused on environmental causes – often called Green Teams – may engage in volunteer activities but participants are “more interested in two emerging environmental practices: purposeful work and company stance.”

Local nonprofits can be excellent partners to companies in exploring how best to bring authenticity to making environmentalism a part of the corporate culture. While they are unlikely to have the content expertise to assist with solving for improved business processes, nonprofits are savvy builders of constituencies and can be the ‘secret sauce’ in considering ways to engage employees, build marketing campaigns and drive public perception.



Photo courtesy of Crescent Communities

2. Encourage employee advocacy.

As noted in previous sections of this report focused on employee engagement, one of the best ways companies can embrace a bottom-up workplace culture is to encourage individual expressions of social good, and that includes fanning the flames of passion on environmental causes.

Empowering employees to ‘live their values’ at work is a trend Jim Warren, Executive Director of Carolina Raptor Center, has seen over and over again “Raptors really are the ‘canary in the coalmine’ when it comes to measuring the state of our environment,” Warren said. “Getting people to care about birds is a gateway to caring about our local ecosystem and it’s something we encourage our board members to do when they reach out to their peers in the workplace.”

Employee education and engagement strategies are strongest when they are supported by individuals who make environmental advocacy an expression of their personal brand at work. While that might lead to company-sanctioned volunteer activities, it is just as often to result in organic expressions of environmentalism including awareness-building, fundraising and family engagement.



TAKE ACTION

3. Embrace smart growth strategies.

The Charlotte region is currently locked in a debate about the future of its growth and companies have an important role to play.

Urban sprawl creates traffic congestion and neighborhoods that are disconnected from resources. Focusing on smarter ways to grow as a city is a key feature of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, a partnership between the city of Charlotte and the community to shape development over the next two decades.

One sticking point as the plan is debated is a policy recommendation to allow for duplexes and triplexes in neighborhoods currently zoned exclusively for single-family houses. While this is intended to help address the affordable housing crisis in Charlotte, the strategy also has the benefit of decreasing negative impacts on the environment through development that lessens dependence on cars for travel.

This has been a concurrent focus of the Charlotte MOVES Task Force, a Mayor Vi Lyles-directed effort to address mobility and transportation issues in Charlotte. The group published its recommendations in December 2020 recommending a sweeping mobility investment program and transformational mobility network plan. As noted by Task Force Chair Harvey Gantt, “achieving this vision will only come through the collective efforts of a broad set of partners working together.”

Since traveling to and from work is a top consideration for where people live and how they choose to travel, Charlotte-based companies are a critical voice in shaping the land use future of the region. Incentivizing sustainable travel practices by employees is one of a myriad of ways companies can lead on this issue.

Nonprofit organizations like Sustain Charlotte can be a partner in determining how best to support these aims with company-wide policies.

“Businesses have both a unique opportunity and responsibility to be part of the solution,” said Shannon Binns, Executive Director of Sustain Charlotte, a community-based nonprofit organization dedicated to educating, engaging and uniting citizens to solve Charlotte’s sustainability through smart growth. “We offer partnership to help them effectively engage in these critical local issues and ensure a win for them, their employees, and the communities in which they operate.”



Case Study: Crescent Communities

The River District is a 1,400 acre master-planned community currently under construction in northwest Charlotte, next to the Catawba River. Developed by Crescent Communities, the project was designed to feature an urban, walkable center while also honoring the agricultural roots and natural beauty of the area. “Developers generally do not have a reputation for innovation in terms of environmental stewardship,” acknowledged Lisa Richards, Crescent’s Director of Stewardship. “But we believe it’s our responsibility to challenge that and to build beautiful spaces that respect the environment, foster community and make it easy for people to make healthy choices.”

Every element of the River District was intentionally designed around ten key areas of sustainability. The property features more than 500 acres of preserved green space, along with a highly walkable main street that will feature a mix of housing, retail, and civic uses. A small, sustainable farm and community marketplace will make it easier for residents to access local vendors. Community river access will enable residents to easily enjoy the area’s natural amenities.

For Crescent the planning process was inclusive and intentional.

“We had a clear vision for the type of property we wanted to build, but we knew we would need strong community partnerships to make the vision come to life,” said Richards. The company consulted with a host of local environmental nonprofits to make sure each community element would be sustainable.

“Clean Air Carolina and Catawba Riverkeeper are helping us monitor both air and river quality, and Discovery Place Nature will add educational components to the trail,” said Richards. “We have worked with the Catawba Lands Conservancy to place a conservation easement on more than 100 acres within the community, and with the Carolina Thread Trail and Tarheel Trailblazers to plan our walking and biking paths through the community.”

The company’s intentionality was not limited to environmental concerns. Early in the process, Crescent engaged an affordable housing expert to ensure that units would be accessible to a range of incomes.



Photo courtesy of Crescent Communities

“Crescent Communities wants our efforts to center on community engagement, rather than just community-building,” said Richards.



Photo courtesy of Crescent Communities

Crescent made a commitment to be inclusive in their community trade base and to set goals for the public and private aspects of the project to be built with the engagement of Minority, Women, and Small Business Enterprise (MWSBE). Further, Crescent engaged the broader community to develop design, development, and programming goals early in the process. “This was another area that was really important for us to have authentic community input. We wanted to ensure a truly inclusive space for everyone who lives and works there.”

Crescent Communities has already aligned a portion of their volunteer and social impact efforts with the community. “Berryhill School serves the River

District,” Richards explained. “Last year we hosted a cleanup day with 120 of our employees and we were able to plant trees, build raised bed gardens and spread mulch at the school.” The company plans to stay engaged well into the future by continuing to support school cleanups, educational plantings, and meaningful integration within the community to support lifelong learning.

“Crescent Communities wants our efforts to center on community engagement, rather than just community-building,” said Richards. “We want to ensure that our projects create spaces that support the sustainability of Mecklenburg County for the long term.”

“We want to ensure that our projects create spaces that support the sustainability of Mecklenburg County for the long term.”

Conclusion

A VISION FOR CHARLOTTE

“ALONE WE CAN DO SO LITTLE; TOGETHER WE CAN DO SO MUCH.”
– Helen Keller

If you have made it this far, we hope you have time for one last profile. Through our journey to document how ‘corporate social responsibility’ has changed into ‘social impact for businesses,’ we have met many amazing people. We have been introduced to forward-thinking business leaders - many on their own and without a blueprint to follow - who have developed thoughtful frameworks for authentically bringing profit and purpose together.

Our final profile belongs to LendingTree, which recently repositioned much of how it engages with social good as informed by the year we all just experienced. We would suggest that no company we have found in the Queen City more completely embodies the ideas presented in this report. If you are looking for inspiration for how to engage in this work at your own company, let this final profile serve as a template.

We said it often during our interviews that captured the ideas presented here - “there is no Good to Great written for how to engage Millennial employees, what to do about equity in the workplace, or how to come back from a global pandemic.” Well-meaning people have been ‘learning by doing’ for a long time and capturing the wisdom of the crowd was very much our goal. No one has this all figured out.

With this report, Next Stage is attempting to start a dialogue we hope will continue in the offices and boardrooms of companies across Charlotte. We envision engagement with social good being adopted as a best practice here, viewed simply as ‘how we do business.’ To make that effective, companies and nonprofits need to cut through the murkiness to create a clear marketplace where both parties are respected for what they bring to the table, for the value proposition of potential partnership. Only then can we hope to overcome the challenges that loom large and threaten to derail our fast-moving progress.

The Charlotte region has won the hearts and minds of so many people who come here, but we believe we have work to do, as a city and as a firm. The team at Next Stage looks forward to continued exploration of the themes and topics presented here over the coming months and years ahead. We encourage your feedback and need your voice to foster this dialogue.

We are better together.

“Our relocation from Ballantyne to South End is a great opportunity to reintroduce who we are to the Charlotte community as a force of good in this community,” said Olmstead.

Case Study: Putting it All Together at LendingTree

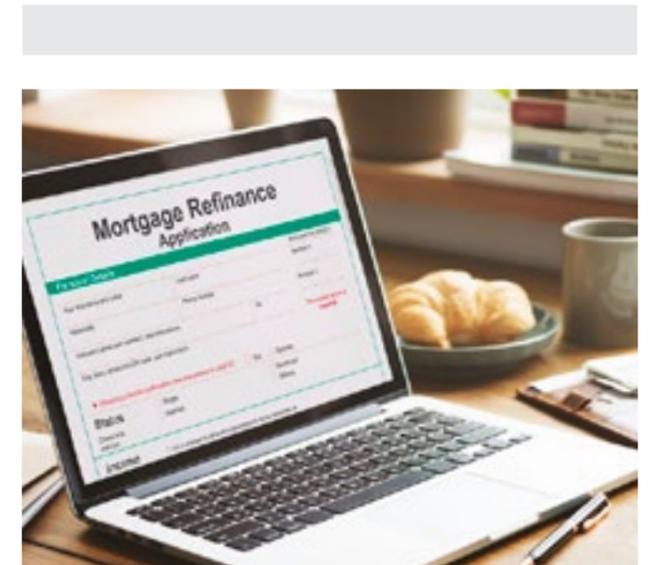
LendingTree’s new global headquarters that opening later this year in South End may be winning all the headlines, but the company’s new approach to social impact is also generating buzz. According to Jill Olmstead, the company’s Chief Human Resources Officer, the two efforts are a natural fit.

“Our relocation from Ballantyne to South End is a great opportunity to reintroduce who we are to the Charlotte community as a force of good in this community,” said Olmstead. “We’ve been a little behind-the-scenes and this is an opportunity to show who we are.”

LendingTree is an online lending marketplace founded by Doug Lebda in 1996. When he relocated to Charlotte in 1997, he set up the company in his spare bedroom in Ballantyne and grew it from there. Driven by the frustrations he found as a young accountant trying to secure a mortgage, a new approach to lending took shape that expanded nationally in 1998 and went through an initial public offering in 2000. The company is headquartered in Charlotte with offices in eight nine cities including Charleston, Chicago, Denver, Jacksonville, New York City, Sacramento, San Mateo, Seattle and Tampa.

The LendingTree Foundation itself is actually more than a decade old, originally founded to provide personalized financial coaching to families in need. Over time that focus fell away and it began to approximate more traditional corporate social responsibility efforts with modest investments made into dozens of local causes. Encouragement from former Bank of America Chairman and CEO Hugh McColl served as a “wake-up call” for the company to refocus its efforts. And then the pandemic hit.

“While we’ve always been philanthropic and eager to help our communities, our efforts were not focused and, therefore, did not have the level of impact we wanted to have in the community.” Olmstead said. “Our recent social good investments reflect a commitment to having a large, well-defined and deeply impactful presence moving forward.”



“Our recent social good investments reflect a commitment to having a large, well-defined and deeply impactful presence moving forward.”



Photo courtesy of LendingTree

The last year has seen LendingTree make a \$1 million leadership commitment to the COVID Relief Fund and a significant \$2.5 million commitment to the Housing Impact Fund, aimed at saving 1,500 affordable apartments from disappearing in rapidly changing neighborhoods. The company also provided support of the THRIVE Fund for the Arts at Foundation For The Carolinas this past winter.

Stewarding the pathway forward for Olmstead is April Whitlock, Head of Corporate Citizenship and Executive Director of the LendingTree Foundation, who took the role earlier this year as a homecoming nearly 15 years in the making.

Hired as LendingTree's 32nd employee in 1999, Whitlock served as Director of Lending Relations and a Vice President of Distribution Programs before leaving the company in 2006 for her own path of entrepreneurship that led to business ownership and scaling brands. She admits it is a bit surreal to return to a company that now boasts more than 1,100 employees nationwide.

"When I joined the team back then, we were this scrappy start-up venture disrupting the status quo," said Whitlock. "Reconnecting with that identity is actually informing a lot of how we are focusing our work in the social impact space."

LendingTree was selected for this final profile largely due to how much their approach reflects the findings in this study. The company is sourcing a core group of investees (called Alliance organizations) for multi-year commitments, most of them start-up and early-growth 501c3 organizations and many of them led by people of color. Organizations are being sourced in four areas of focus: homeownership, financial wellness, entrepreneurship and innovation, and upward mobility.

The company is also planning to weave this focus on social impact into all facets of its business model including how it markets itself to acquire new talent and how it builds workplace culture in Charlotte and across its national footprint.

"Engaging employees in this work is about more than just solid employee retention strategy, it's about unleashing the potential of our teams to make a positive difference," said Whitlock. "We are a company that can help you get a great mortgage rate and ensure that the community in which you choose to live is the very best it can be."

And that is truly putting it all together - profit and purpose.

Appendix

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Special Thanks To Our Interviewees

Name	Title	Organization
Yelee Aluko	Chief Medical Officer	EY Americas
Giordana Andretta	Senior Vice President	Gita Sporting Goods
Jennifer Appleby	Owner, President & Chief Creative Officer	Wray Ward
Elizabeth Austin	Retired Chief Information Officer	Curvature
Griselda Bailey	Chief Executive Officer	Latin American Chamber of Commerce of Charlotte
Glenda Bernhardt	Chief Executive Officer	Freedom School Partners
Shannon Binns	Founder & Executive Director	Sustain Charlotte
Charis Blackmon	Executive Director	West Side Community Land Trust
Richard Bonfiglio	Senior Director, Digital Marketing	MSC Industrial Supply Co.
Benton Bragg	President & Chief Executive Officer	Bragg Financial Advisors
Natalie Brown	Director of Corporate Citizenship	Ally Financial
Peter Browning	Managing Director	Peter Browning Partners
Manuel Campbell	Chief Executive Officer	ASPIRE Community Capital
Rich Carter	President & Chief Executive Officer	Carter P.C.
Betsy Conway	Director, Community Relations	Lowe's Companies
Dan Cottingham	President & Chief Executive Officer	Cottingham-Chalk & Associates
Court Creeden	Partner	Melvin Financial
Evelyn Cumes	Salesforce Analyst	Torrent Consulting
Joel A. Davis, Sr.	Chief Executive Officer	Synergy Engineering
Jason Fararooei	Marketing Manager, Carolinas and Washington D.C.	Willis Towers Watson
LaToya Faustin	Executive Director	She Built This City
Derrick Feldmann	Managing Director	INFLUENCE SG
Valaida Fullwood	Writer and Project Consultant	VF Consultant Services
Ana Lu Gadala-María	Impact Manager	Torrent Consulting
Abbigail Glen	Owner and Bookseller	Shelves Bookstore
Clay Grubb	Chief Executive Officer	Grubb Properties
Quintel Gwinn	Principal Designer	Quin Gwinn Studios
Laura Hampton	Former Chief Operating Officer	The Employers Association
Morgan Hinton	Board Member	Care Ring
Lauren Hoeck	Senior Consulting Actuary	Willis Towers Watson
Cherise Belnavis Johnson	Marketing Lead, Carolinas and Florida	Accenture
Greg Johnson	Founder & Managing Director	Orbital Socket
Donald Jonas	Assistant Vice President Social Strategy & Impact	Atrium Health
Max Kennedy	Client Management Leader for the Carolinas and Florida	Willis Towers Watson

Special Thanks To Our Interviewees

Name	Title	Organization
Phil Kuttner	Chief Executive Officer	Little
Kim Lanphear	Chief Executive Officer	Apparo
Spencer Lueders	President	State Building Services
Jonathan Mangels	Partner	GreerWalker
Tara McAlister	Business Performance Advisor	Inspirity
Daniel McCollum	Chief Executive Officer	Torrent Consulting
Pat Millen	Founder & President	E2D
Kendra Miller	Well-Being Manager	Torrent Consulting
Tim Nicodemus	Board Member	Rebuilding Together of Greater Charlotte
Grace Nystrum	SVP, Strategic Marketing Executive	Bank of America
Jill Olmstead	Chief Human Resources Officer	LendingTree
Rob Phocas	Director, Corporate Social Responsibility	AvidXchange
Ely Portillo	Assistant Director of Outreach & Strategic Partnerships	The Urban Institute at UNC Charlotte
Matt Potere	Chief Executive Officer	Sunlight Financial
Blair Primis	Senior Vice-President, Marketing & Talent Management	OrthoCarolina
Syrine A. Reese-Gaines	Principal	Brainy HR Solutions
Lisa Richards	Director of Stewardship	Crescent Communities
Dan Roselli	Founder & Managing Partner	CFV Ventures
Katy Ryan	Executive Director	24 Foundation
John Searby	Executive Director	Catawba Riverkeeper Foundation
Glenn Sherrill	Chief Executive Officer	SteelFab, Inc.
Wes Slocum	Managing Director	Accenture
Marcel Solomon	Community Relations Analyst	Lowe's Corporation
Adrienne Threatt	Executive Director	Hope Vibes
Denise Threatt	Business Analyst	Harper Corporation
Garrett Tichy	Founder	Hygge Coworking
Karyn Tindall	Client Relationship Director	Willis Towers Watson
Banu Valladares	Executive Director	Charlotte Bilingual Preschool
Jenny Ward	Senior Vice President, Community Relations Manager	Bank of America
Liz Ward	Founder & Owner	Give Impact
Jim Warren	Executive Director	Carolina Raptor Center
Mark Watson	Supervisor on Night Shift	SteelFab, Inc.
Mark Weber	Managing Partner	Croixstone Consulting
April Whitlock	Head of Corporate Citizenship	LendingTree
Kimberly Zirkle	Attorney	Moore & Van Allen